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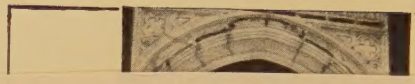

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STUDIES IN THE ORIGINS AND AIMS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

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STUDIES IN
THE ORIGINS AND AIMS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

Being Two Courses of Sermons preached in Worcester Cathedral, on the Sunday Mornings in Lent, and in July, 1910

REV. J. M. WILSON, D.D.,

CANON OF WORCESTER

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PREFACE

THE Gospels may be studied from many points of view, and the partial results so obtained may be arranged in many different ways. The following two short courses of sermons differ, I believe, from other studies of the Gospels, partly in the fact that they consist not of lectures, or essays, but of sermons; partly that they do not attempt to describe the method, or to analyse the results of textual criticism; but aim rather at giving the effect of accepting such general results of the critics' way of looking at the Gospels.

It was naturally impossible in preaching the sermons to acknowledge obligations in detail to the books which I have used. Nor is it easy to do so now. They are such as everyone would expect. The idea of the course was perhaps suggested more by Professor Swete's

"Studies in the Teaching of Christ," and Canon J. J. Scott's "Making of the Gospels," than by any other books; but I have not closely followed the lines of either, and Harnack, Ramsay, Plummer, Glover, Sanday, Drummond, Emil Schürer, and Hasting's "Dictionary of the Bible," have all been on my study table. "The growth of the Gospels," by Flinders Petrie appeared too late, I regret to say, for me to make any use of it.

I admit at once that I have spoken more positively, and with less qualifications, on some critical points, than I should have done had I been writing a critical essay.

The sermons were preached to an educated congregation.

J. M. WILSON.

College, Worcester.
October, 1910.

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STUDIES IN THE ORIGINS AND AIMS OF THE FOUR GOSPELS

I

ST. MARK

THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL

S. MARK, i. 1.—"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God."

IT has been arranged that I am to preach on the mornings of the six Sundays in Lent; and this gives an opportunity for a short connected series of sermons on some subject too extensive to be even thought of in connection with an isolated sermon. I have called this short course "Studies in the Origins and Aims of the First Three Gospels;" my aim being so to bring out their origin, purpose, characteristics,

and contents as to increase our interest in them, and therefore our understanding of them, and of Christ as shown in them; and thereby to increase our faith and zeal. It is scarcely needful to add that these studies will be very slight and imperfect. Such a subject requires volumes, not mere sermons, to do it justice. They are meant, not for scholars, but for those who wish to learn something of what scholars are thinking, and who are not unwilling to think seriously themselves.

About thirty years after the crucifixion of Christ, that is about the year A.D. 63, certainly before A.D. 70, there was written a short book which, at the time, was without any parallel or precedent in literature. It was a new species, a new genus. Its importance was so promptly felt that two other books were within a few years written on the same lines, with the same inspiring subject; but this book stands unique as being, most probably, the first of its kind. It is the book which we know as "the Gospel according to St. Mark." Its object was to preserve to the world some picture of Jesus Christ as He was remembered by His

followers ; a picture of Him as He lived, and spoke, and taught, and worked, and died, and rose again ; to tell the story of His life in the days of His flesh : without note or comment. In less than twenty years the two other books I spoke of were written—the Gospels, as we call them, according to St. Matthew and St. Luke, on a somewhat larger scale, embodying nearly the whole of this work of St. Mark, and adding largely to it. So inspiring, so precious had this work of St. Mark already become, as giving the portrait of Jesus Christ. After nearly twenty years more this same book inspired the last survivor of the apostles to write or dictate his own memories of Christ, in order both to supplement the well-known Gospels, and to give an interpretation of His life.

The Gospel according to St. Mark is then the parent of the other three that we know, and it may be of others, which have perished probably because they contained little or nothing of independent value. It is this Gospel and its origin and writer I want you to think of this morning.

Thirty or more years had passed since Jesus

Christ had been seen on earth ; thirty years in which, unnoticed by the statesmen, the philosophers, and the historians of the great Roman empire, a new thought, a new life, had begun to work secretly all over the empire ; and the empire included almost the whole known world. What that old Roman world was, in those days when Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero were successively emperors of Rome, we can only faintly imagine. Modern historians and lecturers have tried to reconstruct the picture of that age ; but most of us fail to grasp it ; there is nothing in our experience with which to compare it. There was indeed peace within the empire, the *Pax Romana* ; and there was Roman justice, Roman rule, everywhere. Business went on ; schools and universities flourished ; books were written ; the temples of the old gods of Rome and Greece were kept up ; and side by side with them were all manner of strange worships and mysteries of Egyptian, Phrygian, and Oriental gods. In religion the masses of the people were distracted. Their faiths and modes of worship had been broken up and discredited, and had

become superstitious and base. Two religions held their sway, and stood out amid the flood that surrounded them, and attracted the more sensitive and the nobler minds—the faith of the Jews, and the faith of the Stoics. But the strong religious faith of the Jews was far too exclusive, too national, too intensely provincial, to win the world of Greece and Rome ; and the noble ethical faith of the Stoics with its pitilessness and scorn, with its endurance and its high philosophy, could only be the faith of the few.

Into this welter of religions there went the disciples of Jesus with a new message. It was an age of free intercourse among nations ; an age of travelling, an age of lectures, and of open-air speaking. In a few years the message was talked of everywhere, from Antioch to Rome, and from Macedonia and Pontus to Cyrene and Egypt. Their Master, whom the disciples preached, had not written a word ; He had scarcely gone beyond the narrow limits of His own little country ; He had made no distinguished converts ; He had given no precise commands ; He had left no creed. What was the message that these disciples, many of whom

had never seen our Lord, carried from city to city, some message which gathered everywhere little groups of loving sensitive souls to listen to it and thank God for it, and which transformed them into a new and unheard of type of men and women?

What was this first inspiring Gospel message, flying over the world by word of mouth long before a Gospel was written? This is the great problem of the apostolic age. The Acts of the Apostles tells us something of it; it was a message of a new Life, a new gift, a great hope. But the book does not quite reveal the secret. Perhaps we get nearer to the fact in reading the earlier Epistles, the letters to the early disciples, written, we must remember, long before the Gospels were written.

From them we learn unmistakably that the message which took such amazing hold on all sorts of people, in different ranks, in different countries, of different faiths or no faith, was some new power in life; some new Life, a new ζωή they called it; a new motive. Words failed to describe it; it was certainly not merely a new ethical system; it was not one more

philosophy among many; but it was a hope of a resurrection into a divine life, an impulse to a holy, active, loving life on earth; an ardent spirit of brotherhood and mutual helpfulness; a combination of humility and self-respect springing from a newborn sense of God's love and of our nearness to Him in Christ, who was at once the Son of God and equally plainly the brother of man. It was like a sudden burst of sunshine and warmth; they called it grace, a gift, the gift of God; all life remained as it was before, but yet was entirely different. Every aspect of life, personal, social, religious, every intellectual problem that the many-sided thought of that period presents, had to be reconsidered in the new light of this message of grace.

This is what we can see in the earlier Epistles, those to the Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, when read with any sort of knowledge of what the men had been to whom they were written. A new and potent force is plainly in the world. It is not some new authority, some giving of a new law; it is an indwelling spring of light and life that is appealed to, which has to encounter, or be

harmonised with, the current modes of action and thought and tradition.

Those who are filled with any great enthusiasm, who are moved by the Spirit of God, can rarely give any logical account of themselves. Not even Paul, master as he was of human learning and speech, could do that ; nor have we evidence to show at all adequately how he and others presented this new force in their preaching, and evoked the response in the hearts of others. But the message was, beyond all question, inseparable from the presentation of Christ, Christ the teacher, but also Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ living in them, Christ soon to come again, Christ the herald of a new world. It was something very different from merely relating the life and words and work of Jesus, though these were related. His sayings, even when they would have decided a controversy, are not often appealed to. It was not Christ after the flesh, our familiar Jesus of Nazareth, our Jesus of the Gospels that they preached, except incidentally : it was the risen, ascended, omnipresent, indwelling Christ that they spoke of, the Christ in the heart ; some mystical identification of this glorified Christ

with the believer; something indescribable in words of common experience; something that transcends definition. But it was some plain fact. It was "a demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The new power was immense, and it brought light and hope to the world as well as power. It made all things new. It changed men's lives. It united the believers in societies, called out from the world,—churches, *ecclesiæ*, as they were called. Their power rested on first-hand communion with the divine. It was a faith that made them superior to the world; their citizenship was in heaven. They were ready to face death for it.

And the marvellous thing was that this new and all-pervading power and light and life and hope came undeniably from One whom not one in a thousand of them had seen, or even heard of while He lived; from One who after leading the life of a Galilean artisan had taught, as it was said, for three years in Judæa and Galilee, and then had been crucified—Jesus of Nazareth.

No wonder that there arose a demand for memoirs of Jesus of Nazareth? Who was He? What did He say? What did He do? Let

us have a consecutive narrative of His human life, of His death, of His resurrection, while some are still living who can recall Him, who have seen His face, and heard His words.

The first response to this call was the Gospel according to St. Mark, written primarily, it seems, for Christians in Rome and the West. It is only when we begin to understand why it was written that we can begin to see what it really is, and appreciate its greatness. Such was its origin.

But I have only time this morning to say a few words as to St. Mark himself, and the sources of his narrative. I leave for another Sunday any remarks as to its contents. I need not repeat what everyone knows from the New Testament ; St. Mark's relationship to Barnabas, and his work with St. Paul and St. Peter. But there are two or three points, which bear on the sources of his narrative, which may be less familiar, and are suggestive.

Early authorities say that he was "the interpreter of St. Peter." This probably means that St. Peter, when preaching at Rome, being unfamiliar with Greek and Latin, needed

someone to translate his addresses into Greek, and employed St. Mark for that purpose. The work of St. Mark was originally called Recollections of Peter, that is, St. Peter's recollections of the sayings and doings of Christ, not of St. Peter's use of them. Internal examination bears this out. This Gospel bears throughout, as the detailed study shows, the traces of "minute knowledge which comes from personal observation, or from personal contact with an eye-witness." It reveals an extraordinary variety of information, incidentally occurring, on very many of the external features of life and local knowledge. It stands the severest examination. It demonstrably rests on the evidence of some one to whom that religion of Galilee and Jerusalem, and that life, was perfectly familiar, and who had been an eye-witness of what he relates.

But it is not only St. Peter whose memories and preaching, so far as they bear on the words and life of Christ, are here given in brief abstract, but we have some of St. Mark's own recollections. And this is important. The mother of Mark was a Mary who was a member

of the Church at Jerusalem. It is probably in her upper room that the brethren met after the Ascension. The upper rooms of the Gospels and of the Acts are commonly identified by the most cautious of writers. Dr. Sanday, for example, believes that the house of Mary and her son, in which the Last Supper took place, was the one central meeting-place of the Church of Jerusalem throughout the Apostolic Age (*Sacred Sites of the Gospels*, pp. 77, 83). That house survived the destruction of Jerusalem. Its site is still shown. It follows that St. Mark, as a young man, must have himself seen our Lord, and seen Him in particular during those last unforgettable days of His earthly life. There is a fixed tradition that St. Mark himself was the young man who followed Jesus into and from the Garden of Gethsemane, "with the linen cloth cast about his naked body"; drawn to Him by love and reverence, and perhaps by the curiosity of a boy. This tradition supports the belief that the Last Supper was held in his house. It therefore follows both that St. Mark was himself on the scene during the great events of that last

week, and that he had personal knowledge of many who could relate at first-hand their memories of Jesus. The vivid detail in particular of his account of the trials and crucifixion is thus explained. St. Mark himself had "the memory of the Face that none could paint"; and this inspired him.

Into other sources of the narrative I will not go, except to say that scholars in general agree that St. Mark used written, and it may be contemporary, notes at least of the great discourse in Chap. xiii.; and that he had independent and first-hand evidence of the events in the court of Herod. This explains the introduction of that striking episode of the death of John the Baptist.

Finally, let us try to realise something of what this Gospel of St. Mark has been to the world. What would our knowledge of Christ have been, had we only the Epistles, or even only the Acts and the Epistles? Christ would have been a dim mythical figure like the Buddha, to whom a great movement and faith were traceable, and that would be all. Ecclesiastical legends about Him, as wild and

untrustworthy as those about His apostles, would have obscured His memory, and made knowledge impossible. The Gospels are the permanent check on human imagination and on ecclesiastical developments. He stands before us as He lived. All critical research is failing to rationalise Him away; the effect of it all is to convince us that the narratives of His life in our Gospels are substantially true. It was because the disciples knew Jesus as human that they were ready to worship Him as divine. —"'They knew that His humanity was real and complete and local,' but that His insight, holiness, knowledge of God, wisdom, were truly divine: they came involuntarily, gradually, naturally, to worship Him as God, not in spite of, but because of their experience of Him as Man." Without these Gospels we should never have known, we should scarcely have guessed, how it came to be believed that Jesus was the Son of God. They are a perpetual fount at which to renew our faith. St. Mark, in particular, by the perfect simplicity, and objectivity, of his narrative convinces us that the teaching of our Lord and His life on earth

are in themselves the revelation of what is divine, in the human language and the human actions of the time. He puts us into the position of the earliest disciples of Jesus. We see Him with their eyes.

All the searching study that has been spent on the Gospels, and on everything that however remotely throws light on them, "has made us realise more fully than was perhaps ever realised before that our Lord was completely man. But it has made it still more necessary to look upon Him as truly God, because in and through the forms of His earthly life He has given divine Life to man."

This is a part of the vast debt we owe to the Gospel of St. Mark. Does not that Gospel rightly begin with the words of my text: "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God"?[1]

[1] The quotations are taken from an article by A. S. Headlam in the *Church Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1910.

II

ST. MARK

THE CONTENTS OF THE GOSPEL AND ITS VALUE

ACTS, ii. 22.—"Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you."

IN my sermon last Sunday I described the circumstances about 30 years after the crucifixion which made the writing of memoirs of our Lord so necessary; and I gave some account of the sources of information used by the writer of the earliest Gospel, St. Mark.

This morning I am to speak on the contents and teaching of this Gospel.

You may find a detailed analysis of St. Mark's Gospel in any good commentary. It is sufficient here to say that the Gospel consists of two principal sections, viz., the story of Christ's

Galilean ministry, and the events of the last week of His earthly life, each of which occupies about two-fifths of the Gospel: the remaining fifth contains the short introduction about John the Baptist; the episode in Herod's court; a chapter of questions put to our Lord; and a chapter containing a discourse about the last things. The whole of these sections must be taken into account if we are to discover how this Gospel met the demand for it, and wherein lay the power of the message which, in the course of one generation, had so moved men's hearts and minds, and had transformed their conduct.

We must remember that the Gospel does not profess to give any report of St. Peter's preaching. For that we must look to the Acts, and to his first Epistle. The Gospel only contains such selected incidents in our Lord's life as St. Mark knew, whether known from St. Peter's lips, or his own memory, or from other sources; arranged by him in order of time, as far as he was able; and related almost entirely without note or comment. The chief exceptions in the way of comment are worth mentioning,

because they make the rule so clear and almost uniform.

These exceptions are in Chap. v., where St. Mark explains that Jesus turned, *because* he "knew in himself that virtue had gone out of him"; and in Chap. vii. (Revised Version) where he explains that our Lord's words "made all meats clean:" and the words in Chap. xiii. "Let him that *readeth* understand." This is the remark of a *writer*.

The preaching which moved the world, as we see by the Acts and the Epistles, was not mere narrative, but inferences from it, and consequences of it. St. Mark himself very rarely indicates these inferences. But they can be, to some extent, gathered from his narrative. We may be able to see why St. Peter or St. Mark made this particular selection of incident and saying. We may be able to see why St. Mark arranged his materials in this particular order.

To put the results of such a detailed study very briefly, our Lord began by preaching "The Kingdom of God." This phrase must have marked his early preaching. What did the phrase mean?

It certainly meant the Divine Sovereignty over the whole life of man; and our Lord taught that only by recognising this could the world become what it was meant to be. His teaching commanded universal attention, not only because it was so novel in tone; but because of four other characteristics.[1] The first was its *inwardness:* it appealed to intention, not acts. Minute rules of washing the hands, of fasting, of Sabbath observance—how could observing these rules please God?

The whole tendency of Jewish ecclesiasticism was to put the emphasis on the unspiritual, and the external. Christ taught that the Kingdom is within; and such teaching, once understood, commands assent.

The second characteristic was its obvious *applicability to practice.* It was no mere speculation; it was practical; it could be understood and applied; it was already at work in part, and it might grow to more. His parables illustrated the nature and growth of the Kingdom, and none could fail to understand.

The third was its *universality.* It was a

[1] See Dr. Swete's Studies in the teaching of our Lord.

religion not only for Priests and Pharisees and the learned and leisurely, it was the religion of common folk and of common life. This was very soon noticed. "The common people hung on him, listening."

And the fourth characteristic was its *authority*. Our Lord's words by their simple truth commanded assent. There was no disputing them. Heart responds to heart when the real truth is told. Such, we gather from St. Mark, was the simple substance of our Lord's early teaching—the Kingdom of God in our lives. It is good for us to recur to it.

But very soon appeared the great difficulties which stood in the way of the Kingdom, and we see in St. Mark's narrative how our Lord dealt with them in succession. The events appear to be selected so as to bring out three obstacles, three rival powers in particular.

The first of these is human sin. At once, in the second chapter, Jesus announces the power by which He intended to fight this enemy. He recognises it as deep-seated, inveterate, tremendous. And He fights it by declaring that there is given to man a power on earth to

forgive sins, and that means to cure the disease of sin, to heal it; and to give men a power of starting afresh, what he called repentance, *μετάνοια*, which means a new heart and mind. It was a present power of forgiveness, intrusted by God to man on earth for the benefit of man.

The claim, of course, astounded the Scribes. "Who can forgive sins," they said, "but God only." But Christ made the claim, not for Himself only, but for us, and for all who live in His spirit. We all possess the power to release men from "the chain of their sins"; for that is the essence of forgiveness. We, therefore, can and must forgive, in this sense, as truly as we hope to be forgiven or released from our sins.

But this needs the mighty love for men and trust in them which Christ had. Where Christ's followers have the mind and the love of Christ, sin will not stop the coming of the Kingdom of God. But love, fervent, all-embracing, there must be. There can be no Kingdom of God without it. For lack of it the Kingdom lingers.

And the next of these obstacles is closely connected with sin. Our Lord recognised

something more than human in some forms of sin, something mysterious, and spoke of it as possession by evil spirits. This was at that time the current explanation. It is a phenomenon which is not yet understood. Medical science has taken different views at different times; it hesitatingly inclines now to one interpretation, and some day it may incline to another; but at the root of it is a mysterious power of evil foreign to human nature which can be and ought to be expelled; and Jesus and His disciples, by their mighty faith, expelled it.

The third persistent obstacle to the coming of the Kingdom was the fascination of Pharisaic Judaism; the religion of satisfied exclusiveness and of externals; of fastings, Sabbath observances, and purifications. This sense of spiritual privilege steeled the heart against any sense of the inwardness of the religious life; it was, and is, fatally attractive; it was "the leaven of the Pharisees," getting hold of men's beliefs and hardening them; and it was impenetrable even to the love and warmth and radiance of Christ Himself. For this perversion of religion, this refusal to see, He saw no remedy; "If the

salt has lost its savour, wherewith," He asks, "shall it be salted?" The breach with the Pharisees was therefore, inevitable, and the Pharisees, as Christ soon saw, were powerful enough to procure His death.

The Gospel of St. Mark goes on, after this declaration of the Kingdom and its great foes, to the training of Christ's disciples: and His forewarning them of His death, His transfiguration, His going up to Jerusalem to face death, His trials and crucifixion and resurrection occupy the remainder of the Gospel.

It is impossible, of course, in any abstract compressed into a sermon to deal even superficially with all of these important elements in the Gospel which St. Mark presents to us, but it is even more impossible to deal only, as I have hitherto done, with the great points of the Galilean ministry, and leave entirely out the second great section, the narrative of the agony, the trials, and the Crucifixion. Beyond all question it is plain from all the Gospels, from the Acts, from the Epistles, and from early Christian literature, that the death of Christ on the Cross was the great power that moved

men's hearts, and drew them to Him and to God. No part of Christ's life is given with such detail, such adoring love and such manifest truthfulness, as the story of these last days, contained in this earliest Gospel, in the endeavour to tell the world what Christ was.

To-day I only touch one aspect of this; not what is called the theological aspect, but the purely human aspect. How does it add to the portrait of Jesus which Mark was painting?

It is because Christ's death is of a piece with His life. Aristotle has said that it is not enough to have lived well, if one has not died *accordingly*. The narrative shows us that Jesus died *accordingly*. But this is not all. It was not only a death which tested and ratified every quality that had been seen in His life, though that would be much. It also completed and perfected all those qualities. That was soon seen. "It became God to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through suffering." Such is the striking, the daring expression used by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews. One of the most inspiring lessons, the most needed, and the most novel to the

world, that came from the death of Christ, was that we are not only tested by pain and suffering —testing we might bear, as Stoics bore it, with fortitude, or we might resent it as cruel—but we are made and perfected by pain and suffering, if we bear them rightly. The world is a suffering world, and this lesson went home to it. It told men how Christ faced suffering. It was necessary to give details of Christ's trials and death, that all who read the Gospel, all who traced their spiritual life to Jesus, might know that to the end, to the bitter end, He remained their supreme example, their Divine Lord. It is only when we read these chapters continuously, as we do in Holy week, that their full force comes upon us ; the Last Supper with His disciples, all unconscious of what was coming ; Christ alone, if ever man was alone, in His agony ; betrayed and deserted ; dragged in the night hours before the various tribunals ; and all that followed which I need not recount. To retain under such awful pressure the self-control, dignity, care for others, justice springing from love, even to those who crucified Him ("They know not what they do"), and to

retain absolute fidelity and loving submission to the will of God—this was superhuman, and was felt by those who saw it, and those who read of it, to be so. Nor was it in the least like the Stoic endurance of a great Roman, or the defiant courage of the Prometheus of the poets ; it was utterly unimagined, this gentleness and pity, and sympathy and love of the tenderest nature. Here lay the power of the story of the Cross as it completed the picture of Christ's manhood. It called out the Roman soldier's words, "Truly this was the Son of God." Christ conquered all the evil by which He was surrounded ; it did not harm Him. He taught us the lesson we all need to learn, how to face and how to conquer evil.

Of course this is not all. But if St. Mark's Gospel is regarded, as it sometimes is, as the Gospel of the earthly life, then assuredly this is the chief lesson, as it is the most carefully painted scene, of the earthly life. In truth St. Mark's Gospel is much more than the Gospel of the earthly life ; it is also the Gospel of the Resurrection, of the human-divine power over sin. It is well summed up in St. Peter's words

which I took for my text; it puts before us "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, by mighty works which God did by Him in the midst of you."

There remains time only for one or two remarks on this abstract. We began by asking how the Gospel of St. Mark met the demand of the early believers for the memoirs of Christ, and the secret of His power over them. The answer is that St. Mark tells very simply the story of Christ, how He lived, what He taught, how He died, and rose again. The secret of Christ's power is Himself. But in Him we see one supreme mark of the leader and teacher. He believed in man. He believed in His disciples, He believed in common folk. He saw the saint behind the sinner. No one else believed that men and women possessed a tenth of the moral goodness which He saw in them. He knew their capacity. This stirred the world to its depth. Hence men responded to His enormous claim—"Be ye perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." For it was not virtue that He demanded, as did the philosophers; it was not righteousness, as did the

Jews—exact and scrupulous righteousness; it was nothing less than holiness, self-sacrifice, love. And He got it.

I remember it being said thirty years ago with almost a sneer that a great religious revivalist made heroines out of scullery maids. Exactly so. There he showed the very spirit and power of Christ, who made heroes, and apostles, and martyrs out of fishermen and day-labourers. Christ believed in men. And at this day the proofs are not wanting that men still deserve to be believed in. Christ believed in men; and men can do anything, as soldiers or as saints, if they are believed in. Here was the secret of St. Paul's strength. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Finally let me recur to the infinite value of this standard of our faith, which we possess in the Gospels, which give us Christ's undiluted teaching. History shows the incredible divagations and abuses that sprang up, and ever will spring up, unless checked by reference to this unquestioned standard of the Gospels and of the Life of Christ. This alone keeps us

steady and sane. Preaching Christ is preaching the Gospel as the early preachers preached it; putting Christ in life and in death before men; and believing in men that they can be like Him, if they give themselves to Him. We need not hammer in as a preliminary dogma, which must be accepted unquestioningly, that Jesus was the Son of God, an incarnation of the Divine. Men will not believe it because we reiterate that it is so; but because, when they know Jesus Christ, they find it out for themselves—seeing for themselves that such a life can be none other than the life of the Son of God. Thus the early disciples believed. With that faith came the consciousness of Christ's life in themselves, however poor and sin-stained they were; and with it also came the courage and the love and the faith that overcame the world. When our faith is staggered by the sight of Christendom as it is, after these centuries of what is called Christianity, it is well to turn back to this earliest Gospel, and try to realise in its pages what was the secret of the early preaching of Christ which stirred the heart of that ancient world.

III

ST. MATTHEW

THE DEMAND FOR SUCH AN ADDITIONAL GOSPEL

ST. MATT., i. 1.—"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

IN the first sermon of this course I spoke of the sources of the earliest Gospel, that of St. Mark, and of the reasons why it was written. In the second I spoke of its contents. This morning I am to speak of the authorship and sources of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, and the reasons why such an additional Gospel was needed.

No one knows better than I do the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of dealing so briefly with these great subjects. But I think you will agree that the attempt is worth making. It is worth while, as we know, to look sometimes at

our Cathedral from the Severn Bridge, or from Perry Wood, or even from the top of the Beacon. We see it then as a whole: we see it in its surroundings: we get some impression of it that we should not get if we always stayed within its walls, or close to it. To-day we are to look at the Gospel according to St. Matthew as a whole, in its surroundings, from a distance.

First as to its authorship. The title prefixed in our Bibles—The Gospel *according* to St. Matthew—is not a part of the book: it is not a statement by its writer: and it does not assert that the book was written or compiled by St. Matthew. Most scholars now agree that this Gospel represents St. Matthew's teaching; and that it contains a large contribution from him; but they also agree that it was compiled in its present form, about the year A.D. 70 to 75, by some unknown Christian Jew: and that it received St. Matthew's name because it contained so much that was derived from his written memoranda, or from his oral teaching.

Next as to its sources. The writer must have had the Gospel according to St. Mark

before him as he wrote, because nearly the whole of it is transferred to his own Gospel. To be precise 96 per cent. of the substance of St. Mark, and about 5/6ths of its actual language, is found in St. Matthew. The slight variations and omissions in St. Matthew are a very interesting study. This accounts for 11/28ths of St. Matthew. There is a further portion of St. Matthew, amounting to a little more than 1/4th, which is common to this Gospel and to that of St. Luke. This portion is one of exceptional interest. It has been shown to have been taken from a Greek translation of a document written in Aramaic containing the sayings of Jesus; a document which may be confidently identified with the Logia, a lost work which Papias tells us was written by the Apostle St. Matthew. It is this which has led to the title, the Gospel according to St. Matthew. The point of extreme interest about this section is that the memoranda of Christ's sayings were probably, or at least possibly, made during His life on earth. They are authentic and possibly contemporary memoirs written by one of the twelve, and embodied

forty years later in St. Matthew's and in St. Luke's Gospel.

There is still nearly 1/5th of the Gospel unaccounted for, which is peculiar to St. Matthew. This section consists of the genealogy; the story of the Infancy, which is traceable to Joseph, and perhaps to St. James; some miracles, parables, the description of the Last Judgment, and some important details about the Resurrection. The exact sources of this later part of the section are unknown; but all of it was within the cognisance of any of the Apostles; and it all bears the stamp of veracity. It may have been taken from St. Matthew's oral teaching, or from surviving contemporary memoranda or other reminiscences.

After these brief references to the authorship and the sources of the Gospel I pass to the larger question, which may be less familiar to some of you—the circumstances which called forth this Gospel. They will be found to throw much light on the contents and characteristics of the Gospel, on which I hope to speak next Sunday, and on the conditions of the Apostolic Church.

When we hear or read of the Church or Churches of the Apostolic age, we may easily forget and overlook their great variety; and attribute to them an imaginary unity in custom, beliefs, and organisation. We may easily forget that it was a large world which Christ's teaching rapidly spread over, and that it was a strangely diversified world. There was, of course, Roman law and government everywhere; and there was a superficial, and even more than superficial, Greek culture among the educated. But below all this, we are sure, as soon as we reflect, that such diverse types of men as were then included in the empire, had not lost their strong racial characters or their ancient beliefs and traditions. Such widely different races are not soon fused into one type of religious thought or worship. It is shown by the experience of modern missions that each race accepts the Gospel differently. The Gospel acts like leaven on them all: but the results are not the same. Much depends on the nature of the lump that is leavened. The Christianity to-day of the Celt, the Teuton, the Latin race, the Negro, the Chinese, and

the Hindoo is not the same. Similarly in the first century the Christianity of the Jew, the Greek, the Roman, the Macedonian, the Phrygian, the Syrian, and the Egyptian, could not have been the same, nor would quite the same aspect of Christianity attract them.

Broadly speaking, however, we may say that there were three principal types of race and temperament; which ere long developed three types within the early Church. There was the West, with its centre in Italy, soon to embrace Gaul and N. Africa; this was the Latin type of mind: for which the Gospel of St. Mark was written: there was Greece, with its islands and Macedonia and the coasts of Asia Minor—the Greek type of mind; and there were the Syrian and Palestinian and Oriental churches —the Semitic type of mind. Here was very great diversity of antecedent beliefs and of temperament: and into all this diversity came the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The surprising degree of unity that sprang up among them consisted in their acceptance of the same Jesus Christ, as the Revealer of God, and their Saviour; and in their adoption of a new and

almost identical standard of life and morals. Unity did not originally consist in having the same church organisation or even the same canon of Scripture ; and creeds were not yet formed. The churches were united by utter loyalty to the same Jesus Christ and by faith in Him. The Catholic Church began (it is well to remember this) by comprehension of the most diverse types. The unity was one of Spirit—of following Christ. There were diversities of many kinds ; but diversities did not create schisms, or put men outside the Church. Not till centuries had passed did the idea of unity become mechanical, provincial, and therefore exclusive, and consist not in the spirit, but in the letter. This diversity of type in the earlier Church is the first point that we must realise.

In the next place, distributed over the whole empire, and an element in all the Churches, an element of the highest importance, were the Jews. The controversies with the Jews are so prominent in the Epistles, the opposition of the Jews is so prominent in the Acts, that we may easily overlook the immense contribution the Jewish element made to the early Church, and think of them only as opponents.

Reflect for a moment on some of the very foundations and axioms of Christian teaching; and note that they *all* came from Judaism. There was *monotheism*, the belief in one God and Father of all; and a sincere faith in Him as verily the Ruler of the world. There was a standard of morals as dependent on *religion;* on a belief that God was righteous and loved righteousness. The religion of the Jews was serious. There was the Messianic *hope*, the hope of a Kingdom of God in the future; not the half-belief in a golden age in the past. Most of all there was a *sense of sin*, that needed forgiveness and atonement. All these were elemental and native faiths with a Jew, and were essential in every Christian Church; they were derived from the Jews; they all were alien to Latin and Greek and other religions. Think of their monotheism, morality, hope, and sense of sin.

It was the Christian Jews, moreover, like St. Paul and Apollos, and many others, who had become acquainted with Greek thought, and bridged over the wide gap that separated Jew from Greek. It was they who, on the one hand, insisted that the Gospel, the Christ, came for

all men; that Christianity was not a sect of Judaism, but a universal world-wide religion: and on the other, that all the essentials of Judaism, the worship of one God, purity and righteousness, the hope of the Kingdom of God, and a deep sense of sin, were equally found in Christianity. The Christian Jews, or proselytes, it must be realised, formed the solid religious and intellectual centre, and the motive force of nearly every Church in the first century.

But next let us reflect on the difficulty of the position of a Christian Jew. How could a Jew turn Christian? He had been bred up in the history of his own chosen race; all the promises were to Abraham and his seed; he had inherited undying hopes that once more the Jews should be free and dominant, as in the days of David. Was all this pride in the past to be given up? was all hope of national glory swept away? Is not this what his fellow Jews would say to him? Was he, a Jew, no better than any barbarian, with no past and no future? Could he adopt a brand-new religion?

And that was not all. It would be said they gave up their faith as well as their privileges.

The centre of their faith was monotheism, the belief in one God. They repeated it daily as their creed, as Mahometans do to-day. Were they to give up their creed, and believe that Jesus also was God?

And such a God: condemned, insulted, and crucified. There survives a record of an argument on this point between a Jew and a Christian in the next century; but the same argument must have been often used in the first century. Was it conceivable that God would consent to be born of a woman and be crucified? Could there be another God beside the Creator?

Then recall the ancient rites of their religion, so deeply worked into national life: the observance of the Sabbath, the rite of circumcision, the keeping of the passover, the pilgrimage to the temple. Were all these a mistake? and were the Christian Jews to start fresh, bare, stripped of their pride and privilege of race, stripped of their creed, stripped of all their national customs? Why should men who had never seen Jesus make these immense sacrifices for Him?

When we realise the position and feelings of

a Christian Jew in the first century in any part of the Roman empire, taunted by his fellow Jews as a traitor to his nation and his faith, we shall feel that they needed an account of Christ which should give them more than St. Mark's Gospel contained. The Gospel they wanted must help Christian Jews, and of course others also, to meet the inevitable and strong objections that would be raised wherever the Gospel was preached.

Without any very great effort of imagination we can reproduce for ourselves these objections, even in some detail, and to do so may be helpful to us; and we can see that the Gospel of St. Mark, eagerly as it must have been read as a story of Christ's life, and valuable as it was, did not sufficiently help the Christian Jew to meet these objections.

How could Jesus of Nazareth claim to be the Messiah? Who was He? St. Mark only says, in introducing Him, "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee." The Messiah was to be the son of David. Was Jesus the son of David? St. Mark gives no proof. And why did men speak of Him as

the Son of God? What was the truth about the Virgin-birth that they had heard of? Was it nothing, a mere rumour, or legend? Was there evidence for it?

Still more did they feel the necessity of continuity in their history and religion. If Jesus were the Messiah, was He not the fulfilment of all the prophecies, all the long national hopes? Did the circumstances of Christ's life so fulfil the requirements, by fulfilling the prophecies? St. Mark's Gospel was perhaps enough for the Latin races and the West. It did not concern *them* that Jesus fulfilled prophecies, but to the Jews this was essential to their acceptance of Christianity.

Then, too, St. Mark's Gospel left them unsatisfied as to the new manner of life, the ethics of the Kingdom of God. Christ, they were taught, had brought in the new Kingdom; but where were its rules? Where were its principles? In St. Mark's Gospel there were only a few isolated sayings, striking indeed, but not enough to form the basis of a system. Could not the memories of Christ's disciples furnish more? In their own Hebrew Scrip-

tures, our Old Testament, were the books of wisdom, condensing into proverbial form the wisdom of the sage. Was there nothing such as this in Christ's teaching?

Moreover, there was a species of literature very common and much valued among the Jews of the time, the Apocalyptic. What did Jesus teach—He must surely have taught—about the final judgment, and the end of the world? And lastly, the claim that Jesus was truly their Messiah, an embodiment of the divine in human form, rested ultimately in their minds, not only on the miracles He worked—since others, their own sons, cast out devils—but mainly on His unique Resurrection. Was there no more evidence, no fuller detail, of the Resurrection in the memory of the Apostles than what was supplied in the few verses of the last chapter of St. Mark?

Such anxious and reasonable desires as these must, we see as soon as we begin to reflect, have filled the hearts of Christian Jews in particular all over the empire, when the number of those who remembered Christ in

the flesh was rapidly diminishing, and their fixed unalterable conviction of His unique nature no longer moved men; and when the only source of teaching was oral tradition, and it may be here and there precious copies of St. Mark's Gospel, or the letters of an Apostle. They needed information and proofs of Christ's Messiahship, of His descent from David, of His miraculous birth, of His call to be a prophet; of His place in the long development of the chosen race; of the fulfilment of prophecies; they wanted the real principles of His moral teaching and of His teaching about the final judgment; and more evidence as to the Resurrection; of His claim, in a word, to be King of the whole world. Their hearts must have ached for this.

Thus by taking a distant and comprehensive view of the Jewish Churches, and of Christian Jews in every Church, forty years after the Resurrection, we see that a fuller Gospel than that of St. Mark, and one that brought out other aspects and teachings, must have been needed; and then some one, his own faith

strong through personal memory of Christ, and faithful discipleship of St. Matthew, compiled the present Gospel.

Such a sketch as this not only throws light on the Gospel, but, if we have at all appreciated the difficulties that beset a Jew in becoming Christian, it shows us how irresistible must have been the personality of Christ to those who knew Him in the flesh; and how convincing must have been the life and faith and devotion of His first followers. This was the miracle of the early Church. Here was "the faith that overcame the world."

IV

ST. MATTHEW

THE CONTENTS OF THIS GOSPEL

ST. MATT., i. 8.—"Now the birth of Jesus was on this wise."

THE first two sermons of this course dealt with the authorship, purpose, sources and contents of the Gospel of St. Mark. The third dealt with the reasons why a Gospel giving further information was needed, and with the sources, and authorship of St. Matthew's Gospel. To-day I am to give an outline of its contents.

It is plain that the type of a Gospel was irrevocably fixed by St. Mark. Any new Gospel must conform to the same outlines, however much might be added in filling them up. It must contain the Galilean ministry, and the story of the trial and crucifixion. The writer of the new Gospel, therefore,

embodied nearly the whole of St. Mark, and added to it nearly as much again. We must remember that there was a natural limit to the size of books in those days, written, as books then were, on rolls or folios of papyrus ; and St. Matthew in this volume and St. Luke in both his volumes seem to have reached the possible limit of size. To-day we need consider only the additions made in St. Matthew to St. Mark's Gospel : that which is common to the two having been already spoken of.

These additions appear to have been selected largely to meet such obvious needs, or such hostile criticisms, as I spoke of in my last sermon. There will be time to deal only with the most important of them.

This Gospel, unlike that of St. Mark, begins with a genealogy—it opens with the words "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Why is this? It is because it is written for Christian Jews. It was of no significance to Latin Christians to trace the descent of Jesus from David ; but to the Jews it was most important. The Messiah was to be the son of David.

This genealogy was to show that legally—and therefore the descent is traced through Joseph, the husband of Mary—Jesus was the son and heir of David.

The inclusion of no less than four women in the forty-two generations from Abraham to Jesus, viz. : Tamar, Ruth, Rahab and Bath-sheba, has also probably an apologetic character, on which I do not dwell, to meet the objections made by hostile Jews to the descent through Mary.

But the legal and formal sonship to David was insufficient to prove the divine mission of the Messiah. The Evangelist, therefore, gives an account of the Virgin-birth which is not given by St. Mark. The belief in this, though not part of the earliest Apostolic tradition, was probably by this time wide-spread, but had begun to be closely questioned. On what grounds, many asked, did the belief rest ? The narrative in this Gospel answers the question. It rested on the authority of Joseph, transmitted probably through St. James.

It would be out of place to enter here on the question of the validity of this, or of any,

historical proof of the Virgin-birth; but this contribution of St. Matthew to the life of our Lord is too important to pass over without some further comment. The Virgin-birth is not the foundation, but the top-stone, in the edifice of our belief in the Incarnation and the Divinity of our Lord. The Virgin-birth, moreover, is neither more nor less mysterious than is the origin of life, or the origin of the human soul. It is exactly analogous to these origins. Now unless we adopt the crudest materialism, we cannot but believe that, in the beginning, life came from a spiritual, not a material, source—the source which we call God. To say that "the Word" was the life and light of man, *i.e.*, that life comes from a divine "thought," is not a dogma; it is an axiom of thought; and therefore we are prepared to hear that it was an act of divine *thought*, not of matter, by which the conception of Jesus was effected. The Word, that is, the Thought of God, was made flesh. If we believe that natural and material laws are but the machinery for working out spiritual ends, we are half way

to the belief that without the contravention of those laws, spiritual ends can be, and have been, attained directly in the creation of vegetable and animal life, in the appearance of reason and the human soul, and in the conception of our Blessed Lord, the Firstborn of Creation. But, on the other hand, when we remember that the Virgin-birth was probably unknown to the first generation, who firmly believed in the incarnation and divinity of Christ; and that it has been doubted by some of the truest and best Christians who ever lived, it is plain that the belief in it is not to be insisted on with all men as the foundation of faith in Christ, but to be regarded as an outcome and result of that faith which in all ages saints have reached.

I must deal more briefly with other characteristics of this Gospel. One obvious need of the Christian Jew was to see in Jesus the fulfiller of prophecies. Everyone will remember how often in this Gospel some incident of our Lord's life is linked to some prophecy, and regarded as a fulfilment of it—we recall the words, occurring again and again, "Now all

this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." This is characteristic of the first Gospel, though not absent from the third. In the narrative of the Infancy, for example, there are no less than five instances. "Behold a Virgin shall conceive"—"Out of Bethlehem shall come a ruler"—"Out of Egypt have I called my son"—"In Ramah was a voice heard"—"And he shall be called a Nazarene." This textual correspondence was in thorough accordance with the Rabbinic interpretations of that day, though to us it carries little or no evidence. We have other evidence which men could not then have; the immense and cumulative evidence from the results of Christ's coming. That first generation of Christian Jews needed evidence which appealed to them; and the fitness of that evidence for its purpose must be justified by a knowledge of what would at that time appeal to men's reason, though it may not appeal to ours now.

Another characteristic of this first Gospel is the stern denunciation of the Pharisees which it contains, severer than anything in the third

or second. We shall not forget Chap. xxiii., culminating in the terrible words — "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" And the feeling of this Evangelist is shown in other ways. John the Baptist's words, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come" are in St. Luke addressed to the multitudes: in St. Matthew to the Pharisees and Sadducees. It is the first Gospel that exposes the fact that the Pharisees did not scruple on the Sabbath to approach Pilate to request that the sepulchre might be watched. It is the first Gospel which reports the term of contempt—"that deceiver"—which the Pharisees used in speaking of Christ: and the rumour which was spread that the soldiers on guard had been bribed. This hatred of the Pharisees shown in the first Gospel reveals to us much as to the writer, and as to the conditions of the churches for whom he wrote. It indicates the bitter struggle which was being waged before the fall of Jerusalem in many churches between the Christian Jews and the adherents of the old exclusive Judaism; and it

reveals the slanders against our Lord which the early churches had to face. Christ dismissed these Pharisees, it was remembered, with one oft-repeated word—"actors"—hypocrites, as our version translates it. Their religion was, to one who knew the real relation of man to God, an acted "comedy of holiness."

There are three miracles, and no less than ten parables, reported by the first Evangelist alone; some of which certainly, and possibly all, were selected because of their special bearing on Christ's Messiahship, His faithfulness as a Jew, and His rejection by His own countrymen. The Parable of the two sons, of the Labourers in the Vineyard, and the Marriage of the King's Son, will occur to us all.

Among all the special teachings of our Lord preserved by St. Matthew alone should we not with one consent regard as the most precious His teaching about the last day—"When the Son of Man shall come into His glory . . . . before him shall be gathered all nations?" We all know the passage. Here is declared to us for all time by our Lord Himself the principle of the final judgment, and the final

award : and that means the test by which our Christianity will be tried, and pronounced to be, or not to be, that of Christ. "Inasmuch as ye did it—or inasmuch as ye did it not—to the least of these my brethren, ye did it, or did it not, unto me." Here, laid down by Christ, is "the way of salvation." Surely it is to this, rather than to any metaphysical statement as to the mysterious relations of the Persons in the Godhead, Whom no man has seen, or can see, that the words might have been prefixed, "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold this as the Catholic Faith." Surely, when this parable of the Judgment has been read, it is to this that should be added the words at least mentally, "This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe and act on Faithfully, he cannot be saved?" The day will come, and we may all hasten its coming, when Christians will come nearer to seeing religion as Christ saw it ; and for the approach of that day we may thank God for the gift of this first Gospel, which alone has preserved for us this most moving, most decisive parable of the last Judgment.

And we must not forget the unique words at the end of the eleventh chapter, preserved for us by this Evangelist alone. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Wonderful words; which none but Jesus Christ could have spoken, which have brought healing and hope and light to untold myriads of humble souls.

But the greatest treasure in the first Gospel is the Sermon on the Mount, derived probably from the contemporary memoranda of our Lord's teaching, written down by the Apostle St. Matthew, and put together in one discourse.

I do not propose to analyse it, or speak of its contents. It is too familiar to us all to need it. But this may be said of it. The instinct of the Christian world has fastened on the Sermon on the Mount as giving the essence of Christ's religion. It is conformity to the type of character there indicated that

has fixed unalterably in the popular mind the meaning of the word Christian. He is a Christian who models his life on that pattern. And in this Christian life are no heresies, no schisms. In the common striving after the Christian life, Christians are united in a common love.

No one, I think, who studies the Epistles can doubt that the Christian life, based on a simple creed, and on great loyalty to Christ's example, was the faith that held the Church together and drew others to them, and inspired the heroic devotion of the first Christians. This was "the faith once delivered to the saints," a lofty standard of purity of life, as any one who looks at the context of that much misapplied text of St. Jude (*v.* 3) cannot fail to see. It was the loveliness of the Christ-like life in the early Church, inspired by loyal love of the divine Christ, that drew the eyes and the hearts of those who saw it. As a writer in the next century said, "Every man who witnesses their life is struck with some misgiving, and is set on fire to look into it, to find out what is its cause; and when he has learnt

the truth he instantly follows it himself as well."

That Christian life, until the first Gospel was written, was dependent on tradition alone. That it has survived to our century, that we have a written unquestioned standard of Christian life to appeal to, ever inspiring and uplifting us, is the greatest of all the blessings which the world owes to the Apostle St. Matthew, and to the unknown Evangelist who preserved in the first Gospel St. Matthew's contemporary records of the sayings of Jesus Christ.

V

ST. LUKE

THE ORIGIN AND CONTENTS OF ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL

ST. LUKE, i. 3.—"It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus." (R. V.)

WE have now come to the study of the third Gospel, that of St. Luke. The same points will necessarily occupy us in this as in the two earlier Gospels; its purpose, date, sources, author, and, in particular, its contents; but some of these may for our present purpose be briefly disposed of; and other points, such as the personality of the writer, are, in this Gospel, of special interest, and call for a fuller treatment than was possible in the case of the other Evangelists.

The purpose of this Gospel, and that of the

Acts of the Apostles, were primarily for the instruction of Theophilus; to give him full and accurate knowledge to supplement oral teaching. But what was meant originally for a single person was plainly valuable for others; and there are clear indications in the case of the Acts, and a possibility at least in the case of the Gospel, that the work was issued subsequently in a second revised form for general use; and that it is the second form which we have in our ordinary texts. It was intended, as will be seen from its contents, for general use, in Gentile as well as in Jewish Christian Churches. Proofs of this are given in ordinary commentaries and books of reference, and need not detain us now.

The difficulty in determining its date probably arises from the fact of there having been a private and a public issue, the first having taken place before, and the second subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem. We may accept the date of 80 A.D. as approximately the date of the ordinary or later text. It is therefore considerably later than the first two Gospels; it is written for a wider circle of readers. Both in

arrangement, moreover, and in language it bears the stamp of literature.

When we come to consider its sources we have St. Luke's own words: for in his Preface he describes his own authority and those of earlier writers of Gospel memoirs. "For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." This passage, and the verses that follow, state plainly that the narratives of St. Luke, and of others, rest on the evidence of eye-witnesses, and that he took every pains to test their evidence.

First among these authorities is the written Gospel of St. Mark; about 4/5ths of this Gospel has been transferred to St. Luke, and constitutes nearly 2/5ths of his Gospel, the smaller proportion being due partly to the fact that St. Luke's is the larger Gospel, and partly to St. Luke's compression of narrative, rejecting every superfluous word. This section includes the Galilean ministry and the account of

the trials and crucifixion. It is remarkable, however, that St. Luke omits one section from St. Mark's Gospel that we might have expected would have been selected by him as of special interest to Gentile readers. He omits the whole journey of our Lord and the twelve into the Gentile and heathen districts of Tyre, Sidon, and Decapolis, including the miracle of feeding the 4,000 Gentiles. No action of our Lord more plainly showed His world-wide mission than this visit of mercy to the Gentiles beyond the border of the land of the Jews.

Next among St. Luke's authorities was the Greek translation of the Logia, or Sayings of Christ, preserved by St. Matthew, of which I have previously spoken. This accounts for about 1/6th of the Gospel, the important section which it has in common with the first Gospel. The slight variations in this section from the text of St. Matthew are of great interest. As to the authorities for the rest of the Gospel—for that which is peculiar to this Gospel, consisting of rather less than half its contents—we can only offer conjectures possessing more or less probability. The first two chapters must have been

derived directly or indirectly from the Virgin Mary ; the information, often very intimate, as to Herod Antipas and his court, from Manaen, Herod's foster-brother, and other members of that court ; and for the parts relating to Jerusalem St. Luke appears to have had some written document, on which he also relies in the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

But the value of a history does not depend solely on the sources of information, but on the discriminating care shown by the writer ; and on his scrupulous accuracy, where it can be tested. The Gospel, however, makes so little reference to facts of external history, such as the census under Cyrenius, governor of Syria, that St. Luke's accuracy cannot well be tested as a historian by the Gospel. But in the other volume, the Acts of the Apostles, there are many points of contact with secular history ; and St. Luke's accuracy there, even where it has been most confidently denied, and seemed most improbable, has been verified in very singular and almost romantic ways. I think it is worth while to give two or three illustrations. St. Luke calls the magistrates of Thessalonica,

or rulers of the city, *politarchs*; thus giving them a title which is unknown elsewhere in the Greek language and long confidently denied to have existed. Within the last few years an inscription has been dug up in Thessalonica giving this very title to one of its citizens. St. Luke calls the governor of Malta, the Primus, translated in our version the "chief man," a name similarly unknown to scholars, and similarly, on negative evidence, denied to exist. It too has recently been found in a buried ancient Maltese inscription. St. Luke calls Philippi a chief city of this *part*, as we translate it, of Macedonia; using a word (meris) never used elsewhere for a province, or division or region. Even Dr. Hort gave up this as an error on St. Luke's part, or an error of the MS. and suggested a variant reading. But since Dr. Hort's death this word has been found on several ancient Macedonian coins. Other illustrations could be given; but these are sufficient to make the words of great scholars like Harnack and Ramsay intelligible when they rank St. Luke in the first class of historians, both for trustworthiness in his details, and in his judgment

in selecting the subjects which are of the first importance and must be treated fully. It is important to realise this when we reflect that St. Luke's contributions to our knowledge of Christ's teaching are so far-reaching. We may feel confident that he showed at least the same scrupulous accuracy in reporting Christ's teaching, as he did in speaking of slight secular details. It is to some account of St. Luke's special contribution to a knowledge of Christ's teaching that I now proceed.

But first let us think of some incidents in the narrative, which we should have never known from other sources, contained in the first two chapters of St. Luke. I merely enumerate them; the story of Zacharias and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist; the Annunciation; the visit of Mary to Elizabeth; the Magnificat; the Benedictus; the story of the manger, and the shepherds; of the circumcision; of Simeon and the Nunc Dimittis; of Anna; and of Christ among the doctors. Or think of the last chapter, the walk to Emmaus. Do we not all feel what a large place these incidents fill in Christian Art; in Christian poetry; in our own

earliest recollections ; in the charm of the Gospel story? Let us not forget that these are preserved for us by St. Luke alone.

But his greatest contribution is that which he makes to our knowledge of Christ's teaching, by his selection of parables. Out of 23 parables which he relates, 18 are peculiar to St. Luke ; and such parables! The Good Samaritan ; the Prodigal Son (the Gospel within the Gospel as it has been called) ; Dives and Lazarus ; the Great Supper ; the Pharisee and Publican ; the lost sheep ; the lost piece of silver ; the rich fool ; are among them. The mere enumeration of these few shows what characteristic treasures of Christ's teaching would have been lost but for St. Luke's research and care. We all feel that they are the parables which above all others have gone to the heart of Christendom. They are inseparable now from our conception of the Gospel.

We must try to ascertain what their characteristic is. They differ from others as we feel in some respect, in some important element. What is it? Can we define it?

On examination we shall notice first that the

parables in St. Mark and St. Matthew are in general public utterances, parts of set discourses; while those in St. Luke are incidental, almost conversational. They arise out of chance questions put to our Lord anywhere, by anybody, at meals, on the road; they are stories to illustrate His reply. The story of the Good Samaritan, to give one instance, is told in answering a casual question, Who is my neighbour? To give another, the story of the Rich Fool is told in reply to an appeal to interfere in a matter of inheritance between two brothers.

Incidentally, therefore, we gain from this Gospel our conception of the fertility, the aptness, the divine wealth of Christ's teaching. These gems of stories, for they are really stories rather than parables of nature, came out unpremeditated, spontaneous. No wonder that the crowds "hung upon him listening." "Never man spake like this man."

This is a difference in origin. And it corresponds to a difference in nature and purpose, which, on reflection, we shall all recognise. You remember in the first two gospels the oft-

recurring phrase "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto" something. Now this comparison with something in nature is never found in the parables peculiar to St. Luke. That suggests to us that the parables in the first two gospels are mainly intended to illustrate the growth and consummation of the kingdom of God. They are parables of the Church. But St. Luke has selected parables or stories which are addressed to individuals. They have a personal message. There, perhaps, lies the main difference. The lost sheep is each one of us; the lost coin is each one of us; each one of us is the prodigal son who leaves his father's home. To every one of us is said, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." St. Luke's is the Gospel for the individual; and we all recognise this as soon as it is pointed out. What an addition it has made to our portrait of Christ as the Teacher! He is seen here as the Teacher of individual souls.

I have pointed out a difference in origin in the parables selected by St. Luke; they arise in chance conversation to illustrate a reply; and a difference in their aim; they deal with the

individual, not with the Kingdom or the Church; and a difference in their nature; they are stories of men and women and common things, not comparisons of spiritual and natural processes. And there is a further difference, quite as important, a difference in subject. They contain Christ's teaching as to the salvation of souls. This is, perhaps, their most striking feature, which we recognise, I believe, as soon as it is suggested. They teach us that we men, however lost, are still individually loved by our Heavenly Father and sought for; are longed for, welcomed back; that souls darkened by sin and estranged from God may be restored by God's grace; they teach the universality of God's love; that it goes out into the highways and hedges. It is in St. Luke we read of the value of the Publican's confession of Sin; of the bliss of Lazarus. There is no theory here of salvation, nothing of what the theologians call soteriology—the scheme of salvation. That occupies St. Paul, not St. Luke; nor, as far as we can judge, did it form part of Christ's teaching; He taught by story and illustration, as we see from St. Luke; and these stories

still appeal to hearts which cannot grasp St. Paul's reasoning. "Truth embodied in a tale, can enter in at lowly doors."

There are other familiar characteristics of Christ's teaching, which we shall find we have learnt from St. Luke. One is the power of insistent prayer. Everyone recalls the story of the midnight visitor, who will take no refusal to his demand for bread; and the story of the importunate widow who wearies the judge into granting her request. And the story of the Pharisee and Publican teaches us what prayer is, and what it is not.

Or, to take another characteristic, we see from St. Luke what stress Christ laid on service, on practical obedience to God's will, on doing our plain duties. Service is the condition of blessedness. He brings out the danger and responsibility of wealth; the absolute duty of taking thought for others; the dreadful sins of omission we are all guilty of.

I have not attempted to enumerate all the special teachings of Christ which are brought out in this Gospel; but recall for one moment these that have been mentioned; the message

of individual salvation, open to all; the power of persistent prayer; the necessity of humble social service and of thought for others; all integral parts of Christ's teaching; which we owe to St. Luke. But it is time to conclude.

If to aid memory we try to sum up in a single phrase the chief characteristics of the contributions of the first three evangelists to the picture we have formed of the teaching of our Lord, we may say that St. Mark shows our Lord as the Evangelist of the Kingdom of God; St. Matthew as its Legislator; and St. Luke as the Redeemer and Saviour of the world.

If we were limited to one Gospel is there any of us who would not of these three choose the Gospel of St. Luke? the Gospel of poetry, of universality, of forgiveness, and grace, and salvation, open to every sinner that repenteth.

In my next sermon I hope to try and bring before ourselves some conception of the personality of St. Luke, that inspired Evangelist whose Gospel possesses such unique value and beauty.

VI

ST. LUKE'S GOSPEL

THE PERSONALITY OF ST. LUKE

COL., iv. 14.—"Luke, the beloved Physician, greeteth you."

THIS is the last of my short course of six sermons, or studies in the first three Gospels; and its subject is the personality, the character, of St. Luke, the writer of the third Gospel. I trust it will help us to understand and to love his Gospel the more, and thereby learn the better to love and follow the Master whom St. Luke has held up before our eyes.

Before I touch St. Luke's writings, which so clearly reveal his character, let us see first what we know of the bare facts of his life. With characteristic modesty he tells us nothing directly about himself. All that we can learn from his own writings has to be gathered

from unintentional touches. The Epistles of St. Paul supply a few incidents, enough to supply an outline of St. Luke's life, an outline which in itself is some key to his character. Tradition and later writings add very little to our knowledge. We first meet him at Antioch ; the detail with which he describes the early history of the Christian Church in that city shows that he was speaking from personal knowledge. It is St. Luke that tells us that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. In the first or private edition of the Acts, which the Codex Bezae is believed to preserve, St. Luke shows incidentally that he was present at the joyful meeting (xi. 28) which welcomed the Prophets which came from Jerusalem to Antioch. This allusion he suppressed in the second or public edition. Without going into detail it is obvious to any careful reader that St. Luke was specially interested in the city. In enumerating, for example, the seven Grecians who were chosen deacons, he named the home of one only, "Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch."

This is of importance, because we see that

he was there at the same time, and in the same circle, with St. Paul, to whom he was so utterly faithful; and with Manaen, Herod's foster-brother, from whom he would learn so much of what happened to John the Baptist; and with St. Mark, whom he afterwards met at Rome, the writer of the earliest Gospel. St. Luke was a Greek; doubtless one of those Grecians to whom "those that were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen, spake, preaching the Lord Jesus."

We next find him with St. Paul at Troas, and going with him into Macedonia to Philippi; and all through the Acts we can trace whether he was with St. Paul or no, partly, as everyone knows, by the use of the first person—"*We* endeavoured to go into Macedonia"—partly by the picturesqueness and detail of the narrative.

Thus we may learn that St. Luke remained behind at Philippi, while St. Paul went on by Thessalonica into Greece: that Luke joined him at Corinth for a short time, and then returned to Philippi; that he made in fact Philippi his home, and his special field of labour;

and that from it he sent "once and again" assistance in money to supply St. Paul's needs. After seven years St. Paul came again to Philippi, in great anxiety and sorrow, and finding Luke there sent him to Corinth with Titus on that most difficult and delicate mission with the second Epistle. He introduces Titus by name, but mentions St. Luke to the Corinthians not as a stranger to be introduced by name, for they already knew him, but as "the brother whose praise is in the Gospel in all the Churches" (2 Cor. viii., 18), whom they would be sure to welcome. He rejoins St. Paul once more; goes with him to Cæsarea and Jerusalem; and during the two years' detention at Cæsarea, seems to have collected materials for his two volumes. Then he went with St. Paul to Rome, and describes graphically the incidents of the voyage; and we find him joining with others in salutations in some of the Epistles of the first captivity, such as that to the Colossians, from which my text is taken. "Luke, the beloved physician, greeteth you." So well and so widely was he known in the early Churches as the friend of St. Paul.

As the captivity was prolonged St. Paul sent away several of his friends to strengthen and comfort the Churches he had founded; and naturally he sent Luke to Philippi, where he was so well known: and in his letter to the Philippians, written near the close of the first captivity, he appeals to Luke as his true yokefellow, "I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they laboured with me in the Gospel" (Phil. iv., 3). Everyone will recall the note of joy and confidence and personal affection that marks the letter to the Philippian Church. It is easily explained. It was written to St. Luke.

Finally, Luke went back to Rome to be with St. Paul, and tend him in the second captivity just before his martyrdom. We all remember the pathetic words in the last letter St. Paul wrote—"Only Luke is with me."

Thus for eighteen years Luke devoted himself to St. Paul. He was the most faithful, the most beloved, of all the devoted friends of the great Apostle. You know the old proverb, *noscitur a sociis*—a man is known by his friends. We already then know something of St. Luke,

because we know so much of St. Paul. This bare outline of his history also tells us that Luke was loving, faithful, generous, sympathetic, the truest and bravest of friends, worthy of St. Paul. We learn, too, how modest he was; how almost completely he has effaced himself in his own narrative. He was cultivated, as we see; a man of wide travel and experience; he knew much of the Roman and Greek worlds as well as that of the East, in an age when, for the first time, they were being peacefully fused. He had seen and studied, therefore, the working of Christian teaching and Christian life, in the great and varied Gentile world, by land and sea, in coast and camp, and among the great cities and haunts of men. The effect of all this training and experience we can trace in his writings, and it gives these writings a peculiar value.

Such gifts of nature and experience as St. Luke possessed are not merged and lost when a man engages in Christian work. There are many varieties of sainthood: inspiration does not efface individuality. The inspiration of a man is the consecration of himself and his life

to some fraction of the service of God. And this consecration reveals itself in St. Luke's writings. It is in its wide and deep human interest, its delicate sympathies, its veneration for Christ, showing itself in the unadorned simplicity of the narrative, in its vision of the infinite truths and infinite scope of the Gospel; it is in traits such as these that St. Luke's Gospel reveals the character of the man as sensitive, large-hearted, tender, reverent, wise.

To young and uncritical readers the first three Gospels look very much alike. But those of you who have followed closely the earlier sermons of this course, even if you were not previously familiar with the facts, will have learnt that the differences are as striking and instructive as the resemblances. They are like three portraits of some great man, each by some great artist; each revealing some different aspect of his character, specially congenial to the artist's own personality. And of all the three Gospels St. Luke reveals most of the personality of our Lord.

The main proof of this resides in the selections which St. Luke made of incidents and

parables and sayings, unrecorded by other Evangelists. He selected those that most moved himself, and seemed most precious. I summarised them in last Sunday's sermon, and will not go again over the same ground. You will, I am sure, recall how very much we owe to St. Luke's selection for our conception of what is most characteristic in Christ's teaching. And it is the selection that reveals St. Luke.

Let us look now at minor points.

This Gospel is, more than the other, full of human feeling and love and tenderness: it is the Gospel to the poor, the Gospel of equality and brotherhood of all ranks and races: Christ is shown, not as the Messiah, long-heralded in prophecy, as in St. Matthew; not as the worker of miracles, but bearing human infirmities, as in St. Mark; but pre-eminently as a Saviour—"to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace." From Christ's first address in the Synagogue of Nazareth, which St. Luke alone recorded, in which He proclaims His mission—"The spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach

good tidings to the poor"—to the last instructions which Christ gave to His apostles to preach repentance and remission of sins; this, the tidings of hope and forgiveness, especially to the poor and suffering, is the keynote of St. Luke's Gospel.

We may remark also that St. Luke lays especial stress on the ministry of women. It is characteristic of that sympathetic nature which so endeared him to St. Paul as a friend, as "the beloved physician," and "true yokefellow." This characteristic must enter into the mental picture we form of Luke. The songs of Mary and Elizabeth, the testimony of Anna, the tenderness of Mary, who "kept all these sayings in her heart," the names of the women who accompanied Jesus and ministered unto Him, that touching story of the woman who was forgiven much because she had loved much, the story of Martha and Mary, the parable of the woman and the lost piece of silver, the widow with the two mites, the widow at Nain, the pathetic appeal, "Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves," are all kept for us by St. Luke alone.

Part of the charm of St. Luke's Gospel is due to this sympathy with women, the mark of a pure and noble nature. It made this pre-eminently the Gospel of the Reformation, and the Gospel to all mankind. It is not the Gospel of the priest or of the monastery; it is the Gospel of the family, the Gospel of a Christian world and of happy homes.

It is scarcely needful to say that these are the characteristics of St. Luke's Gospel because he more than others felt them and loved them as characteristics of our Lord. His delicate sympathy felt in Christ some traits which had escaped the others. A biographer selects and portrays that which he himself has seen and felt and loved.

I spoke in my last sermon of this Gospel as "literature." It is truly so. It is artistic. It justifies the tradition that St. Luke was an artist. It is so perfect, so unconsciously perfect, that we may fail to notice its perfection. Where else is a parable so told? What can compare in finish with the parable of the Prodigal Son? And though the story is Christ's, and bears the stamp of the Supreme

Teacher, and however told would be beautiful, yet the words in which we have it are probably St. Luke's.

St. Luke, it has been observed,—and to notice it will add to our pleasure in reading him,—delights in anecdotes which depend for their effect on contrast. It is he who contrasts the one grateful Samaritan with the nine thankless Jewish lepers; he who puts side by side the household anxieties and cares of Martha and the simple devotion of Mary. So the stories of Simon and the woman that was a sinner; of the Pharisee and Publican, of the two debtors, of Dives and Lazarus, of the penitent and impenitent thief, and others which point a contrast, may be mentioned as related by St. Luke, and by him alone. One great tribute we all unconsciously pay to his literary skill is that nothing he has written is ever forgotten. The fine literary taste of Renan affirms that the Gospel of St. Luke is the most beautiful book in the world.

I have said nothing of his having been a physician. There are many intimate indications in his writings and language that he was

a physician : the study of these minute points fills a volume. I shall not mention any of them ; but it adds to our picture of St. Luke if we associate both the delicate womanly sympathy that characterises his Gospel, and his scientific accuracy of observation, with the profession that brings comfort and healing to the sick.

But perhaps when we come to reflect on the whole of the circumstances, the most truly great achievement of St. Luke is the plain fact that at the close of a long life, much of which was spent with St. Paul, and much more in absolute sympathy with St. Paul's teaching, and in full knowledge of the infinitely varied problems that the Gospel was called on to face, he was able to shut out all these later thoughts of a half-century of active life from his mind, and give us the picture of Jesus Christ, not as He would have been seen by most writers of that date, distorted by controversy and coloured by prejudices so as to support a theory, but simply as He was. The minutest criticism directed to the point of detecting some theological or ecclesiastical tendency, or some influence of St.

Paul on St. Luke's portraiture of our Lord can scarcely indicate the smallest traces, doubtfully shewn in the slightly greater frequency with which such words as faith and repentance and grace and mercy occur in St. Luke, than in the other Evangelists. For example, and it is an interesting example, St. Matthew writes, "If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye?" (v. 46); but St. Luke in the parallel passage (vi. 32) says, "What *grace* have ye?" (or in our version what *thank* have ye). But is this really due to St. Paul's influence, and not a true reflection of the mind of Christ?

From such a brief and imperfect sketch of a study of the life and character of St. Luke, you may begin to see how it is that, to the student of the New Testament, St. Luke stands out as distinct from all others. We get to know him and love him. We add him to our list of friends in the past. And then the thought occurs to us—What a friend for St. Paul!

What St. Paul was like I will not now attempt to describe. Two very different writers, however, Cardinal Newman and Dean Stanley, have both found it impossible to

describe St. Paul without saying that he was a "gentleman." Some of you may also recall the saying of Coleridge that "Luther was the only man fit to be a commentator on St. Paul, and that he failed because he was not such a gentleman." And is not the net result of what we have been saying of St. Luke that he also was a gentleman.

It was the combination of the qualities that such a word connotes, combined with his deep, religious sensibility and fervour, his capacity for inspiration, and his scientific and historical accuracy, that fitted him to discharge his life's work, as a friend of St. Paul, and as the writer of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is Palm Sunday. To-day and through the week we shall follow, Gospel by Gospel, lesson by lesson, in all the Evangelists, the records of these eventful days, and shall endeavour to draw near to our Lord, and enter into His sufferings with reverence and love. Perhaps this brief study to-day of one who, like ourselves, never saw Jesus Christ in the flesh, but by a life of active service as a layman in the Church, and by careful study of all sources

of knowledge of Christ's life and teaching that were open to him, attained such an insight into the character of Christ, and such a love for Him,—perhaps a study of St. Luke is not an unfitting introduction to Holy Week.

VII

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

CONTENTS AND CONTRAST WITH THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

ST. JOHN, xx. 31.—"These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."

IT may be remembered that on the Sunday mornings in Lent I preached six sermons on the first three Gospels. My intention was to give some outline of the general results which students have attained as to the origin and aims of those three Gospels.

During the present month of July I hope to give five sermons, with the same general intention, on the Gospel according to St. John. I repeat that these are not lectures written for Scholars and Specialists. They are sermons, written for this congregation, for young and

old, in the belief and hope that many of you will find that your interest in the Gospels and your understanding of them, and your confidence in the foundations of our historic faith, will be increased by such a study.

No apology is necessary for introducing into a course of sermons in a cathedral somewhat more of information, and of the results of study, than are usually associated with parochial sermons. St. Paul, you will remember, prays for his converts, "that their love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that they may approve things that are excellent." And he tells us that the Church needs "teachers" as well as "pastors, for the perfecting of the saints." The "spirit of knowledge," and the desire for more knowledge, is one of the divine gifts for which we ought to pray. You may be quite sure that the more we study the Gospels, the more we shall learn from them, and the more we shall love and reverence our Divine Lord.

One more word of preface. The fourth Gospel has been for nearly 100 years, and still is, the battlefield of critics and scholars. The

literature necessary for an exhaustive study of it would fill not shelves only, but a large library. It has been studied from every point of view. The evidence, however, on almost every point connected with it, is fragmentary and sometimes obscure, and admits of different interpretations. I cannot in every paragraph introduce the qualifications, and the alternative interpretations, still less the references, which would be necessary in a complete critical study. These would be out of place in sermons such as mine, and must be sought elsewhere. My aim is to give simple outlines of the most important results which, in my judgment, are best established as the result of this long continued study.

Let us then, in the first place, consider, as in my former sermons, what additions this Gospel makes to the story of the life of Christ, and to the portrait of Christ, as contained in the three Gospels which preceded it ; and state what was the earliest view of the questions that at once arise out of these additions, as to the origin, authorship and aim of this latest Gospel.

The most obvious additions relate to the scene and duration of Christ's Ministry. In the

Synoptics, as every one will remember, it is His ministry in Galilee that is mainly recorded. It is to St. John that we owe our knowledge of far the greater part of His ministry in Judea. St. John thus supplemented the narratives of the first three Evangelists.

Incidentally, also, we learn from the fourth Gospel, from the mention of the feasts, that our Lord's ministry lasted three years. This duration could not have been inferred from the other Gospels. His ministry might have been all comprised within one year.

Again, the long discourses of our Lord with the twelve before the passion, and the interviews with Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria, are wanting in the earlier Gospels. The controversies with "the Jews," partly, it may be, as a result of the difference of scene, have no parallels in the earlier Gospels. The entire absence of parables from St. John's Gospel may be due to the same cause. There is, in fact, little in common between the picture of our Lord as a teacher in the first three Gospels, and that in the fourth. In the first three the common people of Galilee "hang on him,

listening" to His gracious and homely teaching. In the fourth He is in sharp controversy with "the Jews" of Jerusalem.

And if the method and tone of His teaching is different, the substance is scarcely less so. In the Synoptic Gospels our Lord deals mainly with great moral and spiritual principles. He interprets the aim and inner meaning of the old law; deals with the nature of religion: and scarcely touches on His own personal claims. In St. John the prevailing subject is Himself, His relations to God, to His disciples, and to the unbelieving world. It is in St. John alone, for example, that we read of Christ's sayings, "I am the bread of life"; "the light of the world"; "the door"; "the Good Shepherd"; "the resurrection and the life"; "the true vine"; "the way, the truth and the life." No reader fails to feel the difference.

There is a difference also in the object of the miracles recorded. There is not only in St. John's Gospel what Dr. Sanday[1] calls "an enhancement of the miraculous"; but their object is different. In St. John the miracle

[1] *Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 170.

appears to be a manifestation of divine power in order to induce belief, rather than as in the others, a work of compassion, contingent on faith in the person healed.

It is plain from this brief summary that the fourth Gospel not only adds to our knowledge of the method and subjects of Christ's teaching, and of His works, in the same sense that St. Matthew adds to St. Mark, and St. Luke adds to both, by giving fresh details and colour to the same picture; but the picture is itself a different one. There is contrast, to say the least, not mere addition: a contrast as great as that between the simple Galileans amongst whom in the Synoptic Gospels we listen to our Lord teaching, and the well-instructed hard-headed and hard-hearted Jews with whom in St. John's Gospel we listen to our Lord disputing.

It is this contrast that gives us the first glimpse of the problems connected with the fourth Gospel. For the contrast may in some instances, and to some readers, seem to amount to inconsistency, if not to contradiction.

In St. John, for example, Jesus appears from the first as known to be the Messiah, the Son

of God, the King of Israel. He is pointed out to the earliest disciples by the Baptist as "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." We should, on the other hand, infer from the Synoptic Gospels alone that these beliefs were slowly arrived at by the disciples, as the result of their own observation.

In some points, moreover, the fourth Gospel seems pointedly to correct or contradict the first three. St. John, for example, places the last supper before the passover. The other three identify it with the passover. In the other three our Lord identifies John the Baptist with Elias. In the fourth John is asked whether he is Elias, and he answers, No. In the other three Gospels the Kingdom of God, its coming, its presence, is represented as colouring most of our Lord's teaching. In St. John the idea is absent from His general teaching, and is only barely alluded to in the explanations given to Nicodemus and Pilate.

These instances suffice to illustrate the impression, which every reader of the New Testament receives, that the picture of Christ and His teaching given in the fourth Gospel is not

quite the same as that given in the Synoptic Gospels. If the picture of the Synoptics is a faithful historic picture of our Lord as He appeared to His contemporaries, then that given in the fourth Gospel can hardly be regarded as equally historical. This is the problem, as it is called, of the fourth Gospel. Have we, as some critics say, to choose between the Christ of the Synoptics and the Christ of St. John? and if we choose the former as historical, have we to discard the latter? Or may we not rather say that in the fourth Gospel is a picture of the same Christ, drawn by one whose knowledge of Christ as the Son of God went further and deeper than that of the other three Evangelists?

This consideration also brings home to us the profound importance of the question.

Reflect for an instant what this Gospel has been and is to the whole Christian world in all ages: how it has moulded all our theology, all our thoughts of Christ, of His relation to the Church, and of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the very citadel of our faith. That is the reason why it is so vigorously attacked, and so earnestly defended. The book must therefore

be minutely studied by the great scholars of the Church, and every fact that bears on it must be considered. And this study of it means an endeavour to answer such questions as these, among others. Is this Gospel quoted or referred to by early writers, Christian or other, in such a way that its acceptance as apostolic in the second century may be regarded as established? Does it bear in itself proofs of its having been written by a Jew, an eye-witness, an apostle, in a word by John the Son of Zebedee?

Further, may we not regard this Gospel, not as bare history, a mere chronicle of events and sayings, but as having in some measure a different aim from that of the other three? May not the writer have thought that the three earlier Gospels with some slight supplementary matter, and a few unimportant corrections of details, were sufficient as a narrative of the events and sayings, yet that there was a pressing need for some spiritual interpretation of that Divine Person whose work was then at length beginning to be better understood?

Thus you will see that the external testimony

to the early reception of this Gospel as authoritative and apostolic; the internal evidence of its being the work of a faithful eye-witness; and such a historic study of the period, as will bring out the need that called it forth, and thus explain its aim and purpose and character, form the main subjects round which the study of this Gospel revolves.

It is true to say that down to the end of the eighteenth century the traditional and accepted view of this Gospel was that with which we are all familiar; the view that with the possible exception of the last two verses, or it may be of the last chapter, it was written by the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, the beloved disciple, in extreme old age, at Ephesus, or dictated to his disciples. This was almost unquestioned till about a hundred years ago. The question, therefore, arises, What evidence was there in the second century, and what evidence still remains for this traditional belief?

The most exhaustive recent examination of this external evidence is contained in works by Professor Stanton, of Cambridge, and by

Dr. Drummond, Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, to mention two books only. I give you the conclusion arrived at by Dr. Drummond, because it is contrary to that which might have been anticipated from his antecedents and probable bias; contrary to that of one whom he reverences as his master, Dr. Martineau. Drummond's conclusion is that "in the last quarter of the second century . . . . this Gospel was universally and without hesitation received as the work of the Apostle John, who composed it at Ephesus in his old age, after the publication of the other Gospels." We may be sure that it was the strength of the evidence which compelled Dr. Drummond to this conclusion.

It is obviously impossible, within the limits of a sermon, even to summarise the evidence still remaining for this conclusion. But I will give you three quotations from ancient writers which will interest you, and show the nature of the external evidence for this view.

Clement of Alexandria, a writer of the end of the second century, says, "John perceiving that the bodily or external facts had been set

forth in the (other) Gospels, at the instance of His disciples, and with the inspiration of the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel"; and he gives this as what he himself learnt from "the early Presbyters," whose memory might well, therefore, go back to the life-time of St. John.

Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons in France, but a native of Asia Minor, writing about A.D. 170, says that "John the disciple of the Lord, who also leaned upon His breast, himself also published the Gospel, while he was dwelling at Ephesus, and he remained in the Church of Ephesus till the time of Trajan."

And lastly Eusebius, the historian, writing later, says, "The three Gospels first written having been by this time distributed everywhere, and having come into St. John's hands, they say that he accepted them, bearing witness to their truth, but adding that there was only wanting to their record the narrative of what was done by Christ at first and at the beginning of His preaching."

These quotations are sufficient to illustrate the external evidence for saying that in the second century the authority of this Gospel was

everywhere accepted. There was then no Johannine question. That is an undisputed fact.

In the next sermon I hope to proceed to the internal evidence.

VIII

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

INTERNAL EVIDENCE THAT IT IS THE WORK OF AN EYE-WITNESS

1. St. John, i. 3.—"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you."

In my sermon last Sunday I gaves ome outline of the very important additions made by the fourth Gospel to our knowledge of Christ's ministry gathered from the first three; of the apparent contrast and unlikeness between the pictures of our Lord's ministry so obtained; and of the consequent appearance early in last century of the Johannine question, as it is called, —the doubt, that is, as to the authorship and historical value of the fourth Gospel. I went on to speak briefly of the practically universal acceptance of the apostolic authorship of the fourth Gospel from the middle of the second

century, to the beginning of the nineteenth; that is until the rise of modern criticism.

To-day I propose to give some illustration of the internal evidence on which it is held, by representatives of the highest learning, to be proved that the author of the fourth Gospel was at least an eye-witness of much that he relates; and that he supplies true reminiscences of some of the events in our Lord's life, omitted by the earlier Evangelists.

I purposely say 'illustration of the evidence.' An argument, drawn from a large number of narratives and phrases which will suggest that the writer of a book was an eye-witness, is in its nature, cumulative: it is not to be compared to a chain whose strength is that of its weakest link; its effect depends on its weight, measured by the whole sum of independent probabilities so accumulated. Those who wish to see this accumulation in some detail must consult Dr. Sanday's work on "the Criticism of the Fourth Gospel"; or similar books. Only an illustration can be given in a sermon.

But there are some preliminary considerations that must not be omitted.

There can be no doubt that the author of the Gospel and of the first Epistle of St. John—for these writings may, from their style as well as from tradition, be assumed to have the same author—distinctly claims to have been an eye-witness of Christ's ministry. Such words from the first Epistle as "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life . . . . declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us": or such words from the Gospel as "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory," plainly imply, or rather explicitly state, that the writer was an eye-witness, and an intimate earthly friend of Jesus Christ. Our only escape from believing this is to maintain that the writer assumed the style of an eye-witness in order to deceive his readers.

Now most scholars are not prepared to believe this; not because such an assumption is impossible, or unheard of in Jewish literature; but on the following grounds among others.

First, it is not credible that a gospel, claiming to have been the work of St. John, but really written by some one after his death, should have been so early and so universally accepted among Churches as widely separated as Syria, Egypt, Ephesus, Carthage, Rome, and Gaul. A fourth Gospel, written even twenty years after the three well-known and acknowledged Gospels, still more if written, as some say, fifty or sixty years after them, must have possessed, at the time, overpowering claims to genuineness and authority, before it could be considered as at once ranking with the three other Gospels.

Secondly, it is not credible that if in the second century some one wished, as is suggested, to claim apostolic authority for some controversial points of doctrine, he would throw his work not only into the form of a Gospel, but into one in such manifest contrast, even contradiction, to the three accepted Gospels on unimportant points of fact, having no relation to the controversy. He would have repeated in substance the Synoptic narrative, with controversial variations and colouring, as, in

fact, some of the apocryphal writings actually do. No forger could conceivably have so needlessly challenged criticism as the writer of the fourth Gospel does. Nothing, in fact, but the immense and unquestioned authority of the aged apostle could have given even momentary currency to a view of our Lord's ministry so startlingly unlike that given by the well-known Gospels already accepted.

Thirdly, while a clever writer might pose as an eye-witness in such vivid narratives, such, for example, as that of the healing of the blind man in the ninth chapter, yet it is almost impossible that the minutest examination of the Gospel should have failed to detect some errors of fact, some anachronisms, some ignorance of the customs and thoughts of the place and period he was writing about. It is noteworthy, on the other hand, that Jewish Scholars say that this Gospel shews the most intimate acquaintance with the Rabbinic Judaism of the period to which it relates, the first third of the first century.

On such grounds as these the suggestion of deliberate forgery must be dismissed. The

whole Gospel reads, as every one feels, like the reminiscences of a very old man. Incidents stand out in his memory, vivid and clear; and are related, not because they have any obvious importance, but because they are vivid and clear. He remembers the day, the hour, the scene, of some occurrence that made a great impression on him. He recalls the gestures of the actors in it. I will take one instance only, the latter part of the first chapter in which we are "introduced," as some one has said, "to a little circle of neighbours and acquaintances." It was a day to stand out in the memory of a man even after sixty or seventy years, the day on which he first saw Jesus and heard Him speak.

"Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi, where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, come and see. They came and saw where he

dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother."

Can anything be more perfectly natural as the recollection of an old man? "One of the two was Andrew." The other, unnamed, the witness in the background, is the writer. If this is literary art, it is art of the most consummate kind, absolutely unparalleled in that age.

It is impossible to do more than give such a bare indication of the accumulated arguments which convince most scholars that this Gospel was the work of one who had really taken part in the events he describes, and wrote his memories at the close of a long life. The only alternative is, as Dr. Drummond puts it, that it is "the work of an unexampled, unknown, and unmeasured literary genius;" and even that hypothesis fails to account for its prompt reception by the Church as a genuine document. It is not in this direction that the explanation of the contrast is to be sought. It is the work of an eye-witness.

But to say that it was the work of an eye-

witness is not to say that it gives the witness of the eye and the ear alone. It is the work of an old man who has had a long life of teaching the faith, of defending it, and of living by it. In his heart and mind the seed of Christ's words and Personality has had time to take root and spring up and bear fruit. He had won "the mind of Christ." He sees now, as he could not see earlier, what Christ was and is. The experience of some 60 years of most eventful life, and the conflict of Christian with Greek and Eastern forms of thought, must have lifted him far above the point of view of his youth. It was now less to him than it had been what Christ actually said or did—though flashes of vivid memory came back ; what is of vital importance is to show to others what Christ must have been in Himself. He stated his reason for writing his Gospel quite plainly. He wrote, not as St. Luke did, that some one might know "the certainty of the facts" ; but "that the world might believe that Jesus was the Son of God." His Gospel was not therefore primarily a chronicle, a history. He has no contemporary memoranda before him. That is the key to

the explanation of the contrast. It was an interpretation,—what would now be called 'a study.' His Gospel was not meant as a biography, nor as memoirs ; it was not an attempt to represent Christ exactly as He appeared to His contemporaries. It was an attempt, thrown into the form of memoirs, to fix Christ's place in the eternal counsels of God for the redemption of the human race. It is, in fact, as Clement of Alexandria described it long ago, 'a spiritual Gospel.' He does not attempt to explain the Incarnation, as the writers of the first and third Gospel do, in the language of fact and science. There is no contradiction, but his thoughts are in another plane altogether. He begins by assuming that Jesus is to be identified with the Divine Word ; pre-existent, co-eternal with the Father. That is his one dominant conviction.

To put it otherwise this Gospel is not a photograph or phonograph, to record Christ's deeds and words ; it is a picture of Christ as seen by the eyes of the 'disciple whom Jesus loved' ; a picture transformed and irradiated by long years of love and service and spiritual communion.

We may admit that St. John does not give or profess to give a verbatim report of Christ's words; that it is often difficult to distinguish between the sayings he attributes to Christ, and his own comments on them; and that his memory is coloured by the experiences of his life, and the dangers to faith that he felt in the intellectual atmosphere that surrounded him in his old age. But we may also be confident that this Gospel makes a solid contribution to the actual history of Christ's ministry; and above all that it represents the impression left by our Lord's Personality and teaching on His loving disciple, an impression which that disciple would fain hand on to others.

The fourth Gospel, to use the words of another most careful student, Dr. Edwin Abbott, ("Silanus," p. 314) is "history interpreted through spiritual insight . . . . The aged apostle was as it were a mirror, in whom, and in whose traditions, it was possible to see more of Christ's real expression than in the ancient document of St. Mark."

Such then is the conclusion which I would offer you as the most probable; that this Gospel was written, as the early Fathers

asserted, in the main by St. John in his extreme old age. It was written, let us not forget, "that we might believe." And the more minutely it is studied the more ground we shall have for a reasoned, ardent, and robust faith in Jesus as a Being who came from God to draw the hearts of all men to Himself, and through Himself to the Eternal Father of our Spirits,—faith in Jesus as the Living Head of the Church, as still present in it, the Food of all spiritual life, the Life and the Light of all men.

IX

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

THE NEED THAT CALLED IT FORTH

ST. JOHN, i. 1.—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

IN this my third sermon on the Gospel according to St. John you might expect me to deal more minutely with the questions of its date and authorship, and the personality of its writer. I do not do so, partly because the intricacy of conflicting views makes it unsuitable for a sermon, and still more because it does not seem to me of vital importance. If the reasoning of my former sermons has been followed, it will have been seen that the religious value and authority of the Gospel are largely independent of our knowledge of the actual writer; and also that the ordinary and traditional belief holds its

ground, that the fourth Gospel is substantially the work of the apostle John in his old age at Ephesus, and reflects his mind and teaching.

I wish rather, in this and the two following sermons, to convey some idea of what was the need at the end of the first century that called forth this novel type of Gospel, and how it met that need ; what, in fact, this Gospel was to the Christian Church at the time that it was written ; and next what this Gospel may be to the Church in the present and future trials of faith ; and finally what it is or may be to all of us individually, as a guide to faith.

The crisis in the Church that called forth this latest Gospel, so unlike the three recognised Gospels, seems to have been this. Everyone will remember that in the first three Gospels, and still more markedly in the earlier Epistles of St. Paul, the belief is manifest that Christ would soon visibly return to earth in the clouds of heaven. For this event the Church waited for a generation in devout expectation. During that time it was being gradually borne in upon the faithful that this expectation was a mistake. The end was not to be as they had

imagined ; not as they thought that Christ himself had said it should be. This must have sorely perplexed many faithful souls. It must have been doubted by not a few whether the belief in Christ as their divine Lord could survive such a disillusion. Could Christianity with its faith and its hopes of an early coming of Christ be transformed? Could the faith be lifted to a higher plane, and shown to be independent of the transient and precarious events of time? Could Christ be shown to be part of the eternal and divine plan for the redemption and uplifting of humanity, in long ages to come? This was the question which pressed on St. Paul in his later years, and afterwards on St. John. Few greater crises of faith can be imagined. Judaism was still strong, and a foe to Christianity. New philosophical religions were attracting men. Stoicism was a great power with the nobler minds. And on the other hand was not Christianity permanently discredited by Christ's failure to come again to rule and reign, as He was thought to have promised? Who was Christ? The real question then, as now and always, was

"What think ye of Christ?" Had St. John, the one surviving apostle, nothing to reply? Had he no last words to say, before he died, of that Jesus Christ whom he had seen and known and loved as his very soul? What were the real relations between Christ and man, and Christ and God, questions which the earlier Evangelists had barely touched?

It was this demand that compelled St. John to record what Christ was to him. He meets the question "Who was Christ?" by the identification of Jesus with "the Word that was in the beginning with God," the ever-present Light of the World. It is this identification, which, as every one knows, stands as the portal to his Gospel. This is St. John's great contribution to the philosophy and history of religion.

The identification of the Word, the Logos, with Jesus—"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."—These words are simple and familiar. But it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to convey to any one what a step this was in human thought; how great its originality; how profound its truth; how far reaching its consequences. What is meant by the Word—the

"Word" that "was made flesh"? It seems a contradiction in terms. A word is not of the nature of flesh.

Many years ago when the Speaker's Bible was being planned, and eminent scholars were being chosen to edit the different books, I remember one such scholar to whom was assigned St. John's Gospel. He plunged into its study, putting all things else aside. But after some years, if I remember right, he had not completed his introduction to the first fourteen verses of the first chapter. In the study of those verses region after region of thought and knowledge had opened before him. He never got any further. How then can we speak of this thought in a single sermon?

"The Word of God" is a phrase used in the Old Testament and in the Apocrypha; and was therefore familar to the Jewish world. But the phrase, as used in these writings, is capable of an interpretation which is more personal than perhaps most of us remember. It is used as it might be used of a Creator. "By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Ps. xxxiii. 6); "O God, who madest all

things by Thy Word" (Wisdom, ix. 1). And though in these passages the phrase is not necessarily personal, in others it is. Take this: "Thine all-powerful Word leaped from heaven out of the Royal throne, a stern warrior, and while it touched the heaven it trode upon the earth" (Wisdom, xviii). It was not, therefore, an unfamiliar conception to Judaism that God created all things by an Agent, His Word; and it was not unfamiliar to them to personify the Word. And as the generations passed, the personification seems to have been developed, until the Word of God was thought of as a Co-eternal power or Person with the Father.

Moreover, while this conception of a divine Person, so related to the Father, had become familiar to the Jews and Alexandrian philosophers, a corresponding conception had become not unfamiliar to the Stoic philosophers. They personified the Divine Wisdom and Power. When St. Paul writes to the Corinthians of "Christ, the Wisdom of God and the Power of God," he is doing in relation to Greek thought exactly what St. John did, nearly a generation later, in relation to

Jewish thought. He is identifying Jesus Christ with the Stoic conception of Divine Wisdom and Power as a Person.

Thus St. John's subsequent further identification of Jesus with the Word, conceived by the Jews as a Personal Agent for doing the Will of God, brought Christianity at one step into the region of the highest philosophic thought of the world, alike Jewish, Greek, and Alexandrian. It supplied the precise need of the age, and gave a permanent theological basis for the Christian faith.

This whole thought is somewhat unfamiliar, and therefore difficult. But St. John's Gospel cannot be understood without it.

I have dwelt somewhat on St. Paul's thought, because we must not forget that St. Paul had prepared the way for St. John's Gospel. St. Paul, too, had felt the need of transforming the earliest thought of a speedy and visible return of Christ, into a higher conception of the meaning of the Incarnation, and of the work of the Church to embody and present Christ to the world. He, in his later Epistles, shows that he had seen Christ, as we shall all re-

member, as the image and representative of God, as the "Lord from heaven," as "the first born of all creation;" and as the agent in all creation; "the world was made by Him." His thought of Christ, no less than that of St. John, is that His Sonship pre-existed in heaven. He was, to St. Paul, the Son from all eternity. Nothing less than this is meant by his teaching that "God, in the fulness of time, sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law." He sees the divine Sonship as existing from all eternity. Christ's earthly life was to St. Paul but a brief episode between His pre-existence in the form of God, and the high exaltation that followed. All this is fundamentally the same thought as that of St. John. Thus St. John does not stand alone: his great thought was a development of that of St. Paul. The Church had been prepared for it by the great apostle of the Gentiles. But while the thought is clearly seen as in St. Paul's mind, it occupies no great part of his teaching. St. John added to it, and he embodied it in a Gospel: St. John presented the whole life of our Lord from that point of view; and it was this that gave currency to this

philosophy of Christianity. St. John presented it not as a philosophy, except in a few verses, but as a picture of Christ, which all the world could see and understand and adore and love.

I have said that this thought that I have tried to convey is difficult. It is necessarily so, because it deals with the relation of God to man. It is abstracted from material things. In other words, it is "metaphysical"; for that is the meaning of the word. This fact is sufficient to turn away some minds from it. But experience shows that we cannot banish from our minds permanently the thought of God and His relation to man: men have tried to banish it, but it recurs. It is an indelible, irresistible instinct in man to think of God—to meditate on the eternal problem—God and man. And of all the thoughts before the world that of St. John holds the first place. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ the Son of Man is not only *a* solution of the eternal problem; it is confessedly *the* solution which harmonised the profoundest thought of the two great thinking nations of the old world, Israel and Greece, and therefore enabled them to

understand one another. It was this thought that won Europe; and this that dominated our Christian Creeds when they were being formulated. It moreover seems capable of absorbing the truths which have transformed the scientific thought of to-day, and are so intimately touching religious thought. It has not yet won the Eastern world. But that may well be because it has been presented to the East with Western and Latin accompaniments. It may well be hoped and expected that the Christ of St. John may yet win India, and China, and Japan, when He is better understood.

Such a past St. John's Gospel has had. Such a future it may well have. Do we not do well to study it? It has a message for our day also.

X

ITS MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH OF TO-DAY

St. John, xvii. 20.—"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word."

I have spoken in the first two sermons of this course of the contents of the 4th Gospel, and of the contrast between this Gospel of St. John and the three that precede it; of the question as to its authorship and historical value that arose in the last century; of the external and internal evidence which alike justify our accepting, as substantially true, the traditional belief that it was in the main the work of the Apostle John. In the third sermon, which I will briefly recapitulate, I spoke of the need that called forth this novel form of Gospel—the need of a profounder understanding and presentation of the Incarnation of Christ and of His Personality. I endeavoured to show

how the two great Apostles, St. Paul and St. John, both felt, in face of the disappointed expectation of the speedy return of a visible Christ, that more had become necessary, as a centre of faith and worship, than the lovely picture of the historic Jesus, who went about His little land of Palestine, doing good; speaking as never man spake; dying, as He lived, in perfect love of men; rising from the dead; and believed in by His disciples as the Son of God—the picture presented by the Synoptic Gospels and the current traditions. Both felt that this Jesus of Nazareth was more than even His most faithful disciples had yet realised. His place must be claimed in the realm of philosophy and science. He was nothing less than the manifestation of God to the whole world in the form of man; that is, in the only way in which God can be known to men in the flesh. It was now necessary, in other words, to show forth the Christ, not only as He was in time, but as He is in essence, in eternity. It was now necessary to emphasise the thought of Christ's continual presence with His people, and in His Church; and thus to

show how, as long as the world lasts, men can know God in Christ, and can be in real communion with Him, and thus be lifted up into an eternal life. To put it otherwise, the presentation of the historical Jesus Christ had been sufficiently effected by the first three evangelists. The spiritual or indwelling and ever-present Christ filled the minds and hearts of St. Paul and St. John. It was their special vocation to express to the world the full meaning, "the manifold wisdom," the unsearchable riches," of Christ. It is probably true to say that, in the providence of God, this expression saved Christianity at the greatest crisis of its existence as a faith. It is this fact that suggests to us, that in the further providence of God, this Gospel may have a yet further message to the world, and be destined to save the faith yet again when it seems imperilled. It is this consideration which may well occupy this morning's sermon.

For it appears to be not unlikely that the Christian Faith is approaching another crisis as great as that of the time of St. John. In the last quarter of the first century the Christian

Faith had to be disentangled, at whatever cost, from a prevailing mistake in the interpretation of the future, the expectation of an immediate return of Christ. It had also to be shown to be capable of embracing the highest philosophical thought the world had then reached, and thus of inspiring the Church with hopes of fulfilling its great mission to evangelise all nations. Now, though we must never forget that it is difficult to see our own time in true perspective, it is apparently true that the Christian Faith, as commonly held, has to be disentangled from a mistaken interpretation of the past, arising from too literal a reading of its records in the Old and New Testament. Our Faith also has to be shown to be capable of absorbing and inspiring the best philosophical and scientific thought and practical aims of the nineteenth and twentieth and future centuries, and our vastly extended knowledge of other races, other religions, and other experiences and growths of the human mind. Much of this disentangling is already begun, but more still remains for us to do. As in the second century the Church slowly grew out of a precise, but

mistaken, conception of the nature of Christ's coming, by substituting for it a more spiritual thought of His coming as the Holy Spirit in our individual hearts, recognising His perpetual presence in the hearts of men; so now the Church must grow out of a certain mechanical precision and rigidity in some of its teaching and institutions, which are felt to be obscuring the real principles, limiting and hampering the growth, or preventing the Unity of the Church of Christ. It may well be that we need now, no less than at the end of the first century, what Clement called "a spiritual Gospel." And for the root-ideas of such a Gospel we need not look further than the Gospel of St. John.

Let me give some illustrations of the sort of light that may be thrown by St. John's Gospel, if applied to some of the questions now pressing on the Church. One is that of the reconciliation of God's immanence and transcendence. You know what I mean,—the two fundamental, and apparently contrasted, thoughts of God: one that of a Spirit acting on us from within, dwelling in conscience, indefinable, the inner voice of the Holy Spirit: the other that of a

Power acting on our lives from without, pictured by us as the Almighty Father, our Creator, Ruler, and Judge. Both thoughts are true, but it is hard for us, with our limitations, to focus both at the same time. Now the Gospel of St. John so presents our Lord to us, that when we read that Gospel we feel that we are in the presence of One in Whom these thoughts were always co-existent, and always in perfect harmony. Our Lord is at once conscious that He and the Father are one; that the Father hears Him always; and none the less He is always conscious of the Father who sent Him, the Father who is greater than He. The reconciliation exists before our eyes. I think it is chiefly by the study of the Christ as put before us by St. John that we may attain to a spiritual, if not at once to a scientific and logical reconciliation of the thoughts of immanence and transcendence.

In St. John, moreover, there are many seeds and germs of thought which seem now at length to be finding in the hearts of men a soil in which they can grow and develop. For example, is not the Church now capable of grasping

somewhat more of all that is involved in the words, "The Light that lighteth every man"? or take such words as "Look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest:" or "Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours," said of the Samaritans streaming out of Sychar. Do not such passages begin to suggest to us that there may be a wider Catholicism than the Church has in the past imagined; a recognition of harvests sown by other hands, in other names, with other forms of faith, ready for the harvesting? In the new spirit inspiring missionary work, the desire to bring to men the fulness of the life which they already have in part, St. John, and the Christ of St. John, have been before us. They are guiding our steps on these paths of a wider Catholicity, they rebuke our timidity, and our exclusiveness, and give us confidence and hope.

Of all questions now before the Church perhaps the most pressing is the enlargement, in the minds of the faithful, of the conception of Catholicity. This is the path to spiritual unity, and on this path St. John's Gospel is our guide.

It is not only that St. John's Gospel emphasises the need of unity in the familiar words of Christ's prayer that we may be one; and that it puts before us the confident hope of the gift of a Spirit which shall lead us into all truth, and enable the Church to face greater works than any it has yet accomplished. Christ's prayer and promise make it impossible for the Church to acquiesce in its present divisions, and shew us the sinfulness of the temper of exclusiveness, and of claim of privilege. But besides all this, the Gospel of St. John lifts discipleship to a high and spiritual plane far above these divisions, and in proportion as we understand it, makes us ashamed of them. We must note, moreover, what this Gospel wholly omits, and tacitly repudiates; and by doing so we may at last learn the true conception of the Catholic Church, which has been largely overlaid and lost sight of, and replaced by a very different and very human conception.

When we try to arrange in our own minds the various thoughts called up by the words

"the Holy Catholic Church," we find that we all think of an ordered historic community of souls, bound together by a common love and loyalty to our Lord, a common faith, common Sacraments, and common principles of conduct. But on analysing further our thoughts, and pressing them to the point where opinions divide, we find that, consciously or unconsciously, some put in the first place the visible institutions, the forms whether of worship or order or doctrine, and regard them as the necessary framework and condition for the life of the Church, and inevitably think of unity as a unity in form. To others it is the invisible indefinable spirit, the collective divine life of the community that stands first. This spirit, they feel, created and still vitalises the framework, and adapts it to the varying demands of new nations, new circumstances, new knowledge.

Now, of the two types of mind, that which thinks first of form as conditioning spirit, and that which thinks first of spirit as vitalising form, it is to the second that St. John, both by

what he says, and by what he omits, wholly belongs; and he convinces some of us that in this respect he had the mind of Christ.

St. John wrote late in the first century, and had much to do with Church government and the establishment of Episcopal order. But how conspicuous is the absence in his Gospel and Epistles of all reference to Church government! How completely he trusted that the collective life of the Church would adapt its plastic institutions and sphere of work to its ever varying needs!

In a word, St. John's conception of the Catholic Church is not the mediæval conception into which we have been born; and if the crisis before the Church in this age is the quiet evolution of the mediæval ideal into something at once more spiritual and practical and more truly Catholic, it may well be that this Gospel will once more be the Saviour of the Church.

Two things are necessary to dispel the fears and preconceptions which impede the growth of the Church: they are light and love: more knowledge of Christianity as it was in the mind and heart of Christ, and a more Christlike

resolve to see the good in all men. And light and love can nowhere be more hopefully sought, or better nurtured, than in the study of the Gospel of St. John.

Next Sunday I hope to conclude this course with a few words on the devotional value of this Gospel, and its help to personal religion.

XI

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

ITS DEVOTIONAL VALUE TO OURSELVES

ST. JOHN, xiv. 1.—"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God: believe also in me."

I HAVE now come to the last of my sermons on St. John's Gospel, its origin and its aims. It remains for me to say a few words on its devotional value to ourselves—the help it gives to personal religion. The formulated doctrines of theology are largely drawn from St. Paul's teaching: but, apart from doctrines, the root-ideas and axioms of our religious life spring to a great extent from St. John. Until it is studied with the express intention of tracing what we owe to it, we scarcely realise how great has been its influence as the inspirer of Christendom.

I shall not attempt to enumerate, nor to

arrange in any sequence, these root-ideas found in St. John. I can only give a few illustrations, in the hope that they may help some of us to read this Gospel with an increased sense of its inspired wisdom, and the truth of its presentation of Christ.

The text itself indicates one of these axioms of the Christian faith that we owe to St. John —'ye believe in God, believe also in me'—the faith in Christ Himself as our Saviour and Redeemer. He is the Life and Light and Saviour of the world. This emphasis laid on the Person of Christ has already been pointed out in a former sermon : and it needs no words to explain how fundamental a faith this is. Christ is more than His teaching.

It is mainly from St. John that we learn that a certain spiritual union or mystical incorporation with Christ is the goal of our religion. We see the thought in St. Paul of course : but it is not so pervading a thought with him. Would the Church, without the guidance of St. John's Gospel, and depending on the Synoptics and St. Paul alone, have ever fully realised that its very life depends on such an absorption of

the Spirit of Christ, and on such an incorporation into Him, as is implied in the metaphor and symbolism of the Holy Communion? 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' Should we ever, without these words preserved by St. John, have understood that it is of this absorption and incorporation that the Lord's Supper is for ever an outward and visible sign, a perpetual reminder of the essence of religion? St. John's Gospel guards us against the localisation of His Presence in Bread and Wine, against the materialism—a recrudescence of the spirit of idolatry—to which men are so prone; while it emphasises and explains the spiritual union that the act symbolises—'the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.' To St. John the thought of the Sacraments is wholly spiritual and symbolic. From his Gospel we learn that the union of the soul with Christ through faith is the source of spiritual life. 'Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'

It is largely also to St. John that we owe the

religious explanation and sanctification of our love of nature, that mysterious feeling of intimate communion with the natural world. No one is able to express in words his feelings in presence of the silent infinity of the starlit sky; or of wide ranges of view over earth and ocean; or the beauty of everyday scenes and things of nature with which we are surrounded. We yearn to these things, but no poet can express our yearnings. "O Mother Earth, I love thee; O I love thee," is all that we can say.

Now St. John tells us that the world was made by that Word of God which was incarnate in Christ, and which 'lighteth every man.' Here, in our common origin, is the ultimate source of our love and sympathy. It is this undefined sense of kinship that consecrates the love of nature from childhood onwards as a part of religion.

Again, do we not owe mainly to St. John the thought that love is the supreme manifestation of the Christ-spirit within? We find elsewhere the Golden Rule, and the paramount duty of service; we find it in the Synoptics, and indeed in non-Christian moralists. But it is to St.

John we owe the acted parable of Christ's washing the disciples' feet : and to St. John we owe the preservation of what has been called the eleventh commandment—"A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." It is this spirit of love that fills St. John's Epistles as well as his Gospel. It is this quality which enables us to recognise a brother Christian. "By this shall all men know."

This Gospel again teaches, as no other teaches, the need of complete spiritual new birth and transformation. "Ye must be born again." And here, as throughout the Gospel, the conviction may well grow upon one that St. John is speaking from his own personal experience. '*Witness*' is one of the keywords of this Gospel. He is bearing witness of his own experience of a new birth. He and his brother James were called "The Sons of Thunder." That was their natural temperament. It was they who wished to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village. It was John who reported how he had forbidden a man to cast out demons—"because he followeth not with us." But the rebukes of our

Lord were not forgotten. Traces indeed of the old flaming temper remain. But St. John was "born again," as a result of long communion with the spirit and life of Christ. The "Son of Thunder" becomes the "Apostle of Love." It is a new birth: and in speaking of the need of regeneration he was speaking of what he knew.

When this idea of seeing in St. John's Gospel his own testimony to his own experience has been once accepted, other illustrations will occur: and both much light will be thrown on the Gospel, and help will be given to us in our use of it. It enables us to understand our own experience.

The whole thought of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter, Strengthener, Enlightener—the Spirit which is to abide with Christ's disciples and the Church for ever—a Spirit which Christ identifies with Himself—comes to us through St. John, and reads like the testimony to his own innermost and ripest experience. He knew the truth of Christ's words, "I will not leave you comfortless—I will come to you." It makes the pages of St. John glow with a fresh light and warmth when we read them as St.

John's personal witness to his own experience. It is a record of the fulfilment of Christ's promise in St. John's own life. He gives us the ripe fruit of the seed which the Lord's words and intercourse with Him, in the flesh and in the Spirit, had sown in the sensitive mind and loving heart of His servant and friend.

And thus St. John's Gospel is the true forerunner of the long series of devotional books which have recorded the heights and depths of Christian experience, its aspirations and its penitence, the result of feeding on the words of Christ, and entering into communion with Him. Think of the liturgies and service-books of the Church, the record of the inspiration of all Christendom. Those prayers and praises all arose in the same way. Recall the Imitation of Christ, Erasmus's Enchiridion, the Pilgrim's Progress, Baxter's Saints' Rest, Law's Serious Call, Wesley's Hymns, the Sacra Privata, or the Christian Year, which have recorded the growing experience of the Church and made channels for our thoughts to flow in. Such works, of which the Gospel according to St.

John is the first and the greatest, are illustrations at once of catholicity and of continuous growth, and of the constant presence of Christ in the hearts of His faithful followers.

I must mention one other root-thought, perhaps not too familiar to us, which we owe to St. John—the thought of Christ as constituting a present judgment: that is, as One whose coming has shewn things in their true light; One who has enabled us, if we do not through indolence, or worldliness, or spiritual prejudice, close our eyes, to see right and wrong as they are, as God sees them. Such words as "For judgment I am come into this world that they which see not might see"—and their terrible warning sequel, "that they which see might be made blind," with their pointed application to the religious people of the day and of every day—such words as these are only found in St. John. Have we fully realised the meaning of the words, "I am come a light into the world." Are we now daily getting light from Christ? Our great danger, the great danger, I mean, of religious people, is that we should early form our principles of belief and conduct

and be rather proud of consistently maintaining them, but never *test* them and readjust them, and enlarge them in accordance with the light of Christ. They are, if we will face the truth, *our* principles, not His, that we so maintain. We seek, it may be, no fresh light. We do not grow: we take no trouble to grow.

Nothing less than reading the whole Gospel through, with the special aim of noting what we owe to it, will give us an adequate sense of its value. And such a study can scarcely fail to teach us how very much there is in that Gospel of which we have failed to see the true and full significance; Bishop Westcott used to say that we should never understand St. John till India was converted. We shall see too how much hope there is that by such study the Church will eventually come nearer to the mind of Christ. In St. John's Gospel is a region above the clash of arms of the various sections of the great Catholic Church of Christ. Here is a region of peace and love and joy in the presence of God.

Finally, in closing this series of sermons on the origins and aims of the four Gospels let

us think how much we owe to those devoted students of the New Testament who in spite of hard words and cruel misunderstandings, have helped, and are still helping, the Church to see Christ as He was, and the Church as it was in its origin, its surroundings, its essence, its ideal, before it became changed, crystallised, by secular, external, local and non-permanent influences. The results of such study may perplex us for the moment, but they are full of hope for the cause of Christianity.

I believe that, if not in our day, yet in some day not indefinitely remote, as a result of going back to the New Testament and to Christ Himself, with the single eye for truth, a more spiritual conception of Christ's teaching and work will antiquate the intellectual mistakes, and banish the unholy tempers, that now divide the branches of the One Holy Catholic Church; and that we shall at last combine complete "unity of spirit in the bond of peace" with very large diversity of form. Such advancing knowledge has already removed some of the most serious doctrinal misconceptions of the Christian

Faith, and it will go on to banish more. It will also change some of our preconceptions as to the essentials of the visible constitution and unity and aims of the Church of Christ. Christ is too great for any of us to understand Him completely. All our differences arise from the insistence of each one—an insistence pathetic in its ignorance—that he sees the whole. Let us never be afraid of Light and Truth and Love: for God Himself is Light and Truth and Love.

Let us all pray for the spirit of wisdom and knowledge and counsel to enable us and all the Church to learn more and more from the Gospel of St. John, the profoundest interpretation of the mind of our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.

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